

My youngest daughter had cystic fibrosis which was a real concern in those days. She was only 7 years old when she died. This affected my wife and me terribly - our hearts were broken, especially my wife. She seemed to lose herself in her grief and she became anorexic, although I'm not sure we knew what that was then.

After years of suffering and pain, Roslyn too passed away. I was left on my own to bring up my two remaining children. Some years later, one bloody awful night, I received a telephone call from the Police telling me my oldest daughter, who was 19 at the time, had died in a car accident. I think that was about all I could stand. I fell into a prolonged and deep depression. I wouldn't leave the house for days at a time - I would just sit and think about the people I had loved and had lost.

I had ten years of suffering depression. I refused to take the medicated route; instead I fought it on my own. I have to admit there were many times when I thought it would be the end of me. There was a time I had seriously contemplated suicide, but I overcame those dark moments.

Whilst trying to recover, many days I would walk around the city. I loved going to St Mary's Cathedral where I would sit, listening to the music and just being around people. It made me feel less alone.

About five years ago, I heard from a friend of mine on the streets about this place called 'The Shopfront' and how good it was, so I decided to check it out for myself.

I've been coming here regularly ever since. They don't judge you here. They are so welcoming. And no matter who you are, when you walk through that front door, you are treated with respect and genuine care. The volunteers at The Shopfront are lovely. I've seen a lot come and go over the years, but they all do a wonderful job.

Over the years, I guess I'm paying back a little too. I like to chat and I've a gift for the gab, as you can tell (he said smiling). So I sit and chat with all the other visitors because I can relate to their stories of loss and poverty you see.

I guess I've always been a bit of a giver, even when we had very little. I'm so thankful now that I want to help others when I see they are in need. Each time I visit The Shopfront, if there is leftover food, I make a point of taking some and delivering it to the homeless people in the park nearby.

At my age, I don't need a lot to be honest, but my dream is to win it big in Lotto, so I could donate \$1 million to The Shopfront so they can keep on helping more people. That'd be nice" said Murray.

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Our Next Generation of Carers

The Shopfront welcomes students from the University of Western Australia (UWA) who are undertaking a degree in Social Services so they can gain invaluable, practical experience in working with people in need in the community. Vicky is coming to the end of her thirteen (13) week placement, so we take a moment to speak with her about her experience, and discover what she has learned during her time at The Shopfront.

"I've been undertaking practical experience at The Shopfront as part of my Master of Social Services studies at the University at Western Australia. I come to The Shopfront each day for five (5) hours to help out as best I can, and to learn how a professional organisation working with people in need operates. It's been such a wonderful opportunity, putting into practice what I am learning in theory from my lectures and study, and seeing how this translates into the real world.

I have learnt by observing how Damian Walsh (the Director) and the volunteers work together, and how they interact with visitors who come each day. I was so impressed by their professional manner and how friendly and welcoming they are, not only to me but also to the visitors. I must admit that before I commenced my placement, I had a lot of misconceptions and fears about what it would be like. I'd not really had any involvement or interactions with people who are homeless, suffering from mental health issues or addictions. It was all very new to me. But most of the people have been pretty nice, some remember my name and interested in me and what I'm doing.

One important skill I've learned during my time here has been how to communicate with the people. It's so important to be genuinely friendly and non-judgemental. To let them share, in their own time, what their issues might be and to discover what their individual needs are. From that point, we can work out how best to assist each person.

I just didn't realise before I started here that there are so many people in need in the community. I don't think many people my age are aware of this fact.

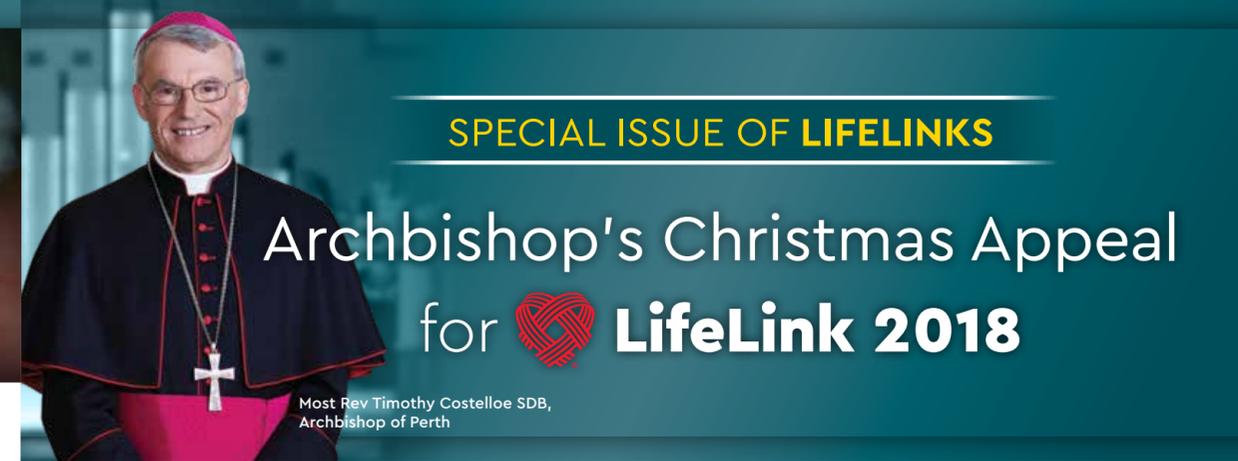


Most visitors have experienced trauma, loss or desperate need. Some have shared stories of spouses or children who have died, abuse from parents or others, social poverty, loneliness and isolation. Many are battling addictions and just don't know how to get better. I've noticed that a lot of visitors come not for the food and drink, but because they are lonely and they crave company.

It's so busy here. It's incredible to think that around 25,000 people each year come to The Shopfront. I just didn't realise before I started here that there are so many people in need in the community. I don't think many people my age are aware of this fact.

I've changed a lot as a result of my placement here. I thought I wasn't judgmental, but I now see that perhaps I was. I've learned to accept people as they are and listen to what they have to share - which will prove vitally important for my future social work. The experience has been invaluable and I am so grateful to have been a part of The Shopfront family these past weeks.

I'll miss Damian and the volunteers as they have become 'friends'. I also want to try and find time to be a volunteer myself if I can, as it is so rewarding giving of your time and yourself to help someone in need" said Vicky.



SPECIAL ISSUE OF LIFELINKS

Archbishop's Christmas Appeal for LifeLink 2018

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB, Archbishop of Perth

A GOOD SAMARITAN

Murray, 78 years young but looking nowhere near this age, is a regular visitor to The Shopfront. He courageously agreed to share with us his personal experience of heartbreaking loss, depression and pain, so that we might better understand the wonderful work of The Shopfront, and the positive impact it has had on his life... and the lives of so many people in need within the community.

"I was born in Adelaide. My parents had seven children to care for which must have been extremely hard for them as we were very poor. I remember we all lived in just one bedroom, and my earliest recollection was of being hungry. I remember neighbours would call me over to say hello and give me bits of food to take home.

My father worked at a Tannery for more than 30 years, and it was hard work indeed. It was no wonder he fell ill and could no longer provide for our family. I was forced to leave what schooling I had been receiving, and at just 13 years of age, I started work in a soap factory to help my family.

I was in my early 20s when I met Roslyn, a beautiful hairdresser from Perth who was visiting Adelaide. We met, fell in love and married in a very short time. Neither of us had lot financially. I recall that when we moved to Perth, I arrived with just \$10 in my pocket and we rented a little place for \$10 per week. Roslyn said not to worry, as she had good clients and could earn what we needed.

It took a while for me to find work especially with little education, but I eventually found employment as a delivery driver for a Bakery Supplier, delivering yeast to cafes, bakeries and restaurants all over Perth. Life wasn't rich, but my wife and I were happy.

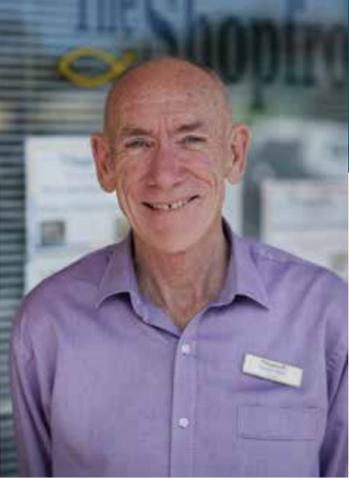
We had three beautiful children together - two daughters and a son, and we loved them dearly.

CONTINUED ►



EDITOR'S NOTE: Sincere thanks Murray for your courage and your spirit. It was an absolute pleasure to meet you and I enjoyed our chat immensely. Your example is a reminder that we can all do something, no matter our circumstances. **YOU** are indeed, a Good Samaritan!

The Shopfront WORKING ON THE FRONT LINE – FOR PEOPLE IN NEED



We recently sat down to chat with **Damian Walsh** to discover his thoughts on the past 18 months following his appointment as Director of **The Shopfront**, and to learn more about the people and the work of this agency which serves **'on the front line for people need'** in the community.

It's about 18 months since you were appointed as Director of The Shopfront, what has your experience been?

Difficult, challenging and very enjoyable. Difficult in that we've tried to bring The Shopfront back closer to its original purpose. **Which is?** Simple. Simple hospitality. It had grown to be an all-encompassing welfare organisation - no matter what you needed, you'd get it - and that caused some hassles. We're not set-up to supply washing machines and whitegoods due to liability issues, we can't supply furniture and larger items as we're not geared for that. We don't have the room for Centrelink and other organisations to set-up onsite services here. There are many organisations better served to provide these important needs such as these, for example Vinnies and the Salvation Army. This change was initially difficult for some volunteers, visitors and staff, but I believe we are now focusing on our original vision. Simple hospitality and genuine care.

It is so rewarding working here. **At The Shopfront, we deliberately don't refer to people who come here as clients or customers, they are 'visitors'.** When I go to schools and speak to students I ask them *"well what does the word visitor mean to you, how would you treat a visitor to your home?"*

You welcome them, you might offer them some food or drink, but it is the relationship that you build with that visitor that's most important. That's the culture we have here at The Shopfront.

At the core of what we do and why we do it – staff and volunteers – is Faith. We start and end every day with The Shopfront Prayer.

What does The Shopfront do, and whom does it serve?

The Shopfront is there for people who are having a hard time. If you are homeless, battling additions, facing mental health issues, feeling depressed or lonely or isolated, feel like you have nowhere or no one to turn to, then we are here to welcome you at The Shopfront.

It's as simple as that. Anecdotally, many people will fit into multiple categories e.g. mental health & an addiction issue. I would estimate that our visitor demographics would be something like:

Homeless	15%
People struggling financially	30%
Mental Health	40%
Loneliness	10%
Alcohol or other substance misuse	60%

The most critical issues you find visitors are experiencing at the moment are financial stress, and issues around living with depression.

Visitors to The Shopfront are offered hospitality – something to eat, something to drink. They are offered somewhere comfortable to sit and if they choose to do so, they can share with us what their need is and we try and determine how we can help. Some of the practical things we provide are emergency food supplies; Smartrider prepaid cards for public transport; toiletries and blankets, winter jackets and emergency financial assistance. In our current premises, we have showers available which many of our homeless visitors say is a real blessing. We have volunteers who provide haircuts, as normal hairdressing facilities are something many visitors can't access or can't afford.



How many people each week come to The Shopfront?

We are open Monday to Friday and two evening each week. We welcome on average 540 visitors each week. On an annual basis, we assist and support more than 4,500 people who turn to us for help, and who collectively make more than 25,000 visits to The Shopfront.

Why do they come to The Shopfront?

They come to us at The Shopfront because they may have been referred from a Government or a Community Service organisation. For many, it's all based on word of mouth. Someone has or does visit us, and they share their experience with others that they meet.

I think the reasons so many people visit us at The Shopfront is because they know they will be welcomed. They will be safe. They will not be judged. They will find genuine compassion and understanding and acceptance.

What do you think most people don't know or have a misconception about people who seek help from your agency?

The people who come to The Shopfront are just like you and me. A majority of our visitors you could pass in the street and you would not know that they are struggling. Not everyone in need looks like a person you might find living on the streets... but their need is just as real. For many, they need help with something that has just occurred, it's immediate and it's "now". I also think they would be very surprised at just how busy this place is – how many visitors come here for help. I believe that most people don't realise how many people there are in need within our community.

We've asked several visitors to share their personal stories with us, but they are reluctant to do so, why is this?

People are reluctant to share their stories because they fear being judged. They worry that someone they know will find out. A lot of people hide or wear masks. I teach the university placement students who work with us here that people will have a public face where they present that all is well to the world. It is only when they visit us at The Shopfront, that they feel safe to reveal their true selves – their vulnerability, their pain, their need.



Protecting the privacy of the people involved, can you share with us some examples of the people who visit The Shopfront, what their issues are and how you've been able to help them?

There is one man who visits nearly every day and most nights we are open, who suffers terribly from depression and isolation. We have struck up a real bond and he has shared so much of his story with me. Thankfully I've been able to organise some counselling for him with another of our LifeLink agencies – Centrecare. If this man didn't come here, he would sit for endless hours, day in day out, looking at the same four walls of his small apartment. There are so many people like this who are suffering in silence that we just don't see and don't know about. That makes me sad.

I know you spoke with one of our visitors, Susan (not her real name), earlier this morning. She said she wanted to share her story with you because she is so grateful to The Shopfront and wants people to know how she feels, and her experience.

Yes, Susan was a lovely woman and her story was a great example of how The Shopfront helps. She shared with me that she'd been employed in a large organisation for more than 25 years, but left as a result of bullying in the work place.

"I suffered severe depression and had to take time off on medical advice, however, after using up all my sick leave, holiday and other entitlements, I was retrenched. As a single mum with young children and caring for my elderly parents, my financial situation became dire. I could afford to cover my rent with my benefit payments but struggled each day to have enough food for my family.

I was referred by a Gov't agency to The Shopfront. I still remember the first time I came here. They were so friendly, so welcoming. I was offered a cup of coffee – you know I was always the one offering to make coffee for someone; I'd never had anyone offer to do that for me! It seems such a small thing, but it meant a great deal.

The Shopfront gave me TLC (tender loving care) that I badly needed at that time. For almost 18 months or more, they gave me food several times each week, they helped out with train fares as sometimes I'd only have enough money to catch the train here, but not home. Occasionally, they might help me cover an overdue electricity bill.

What was most important was that I didn't feel alone. I received such loving care and support from everyone at The Shopfront. Eventually, I recovered. I appealed my retrenchment and won my job back. The Shopfront and God gave me the strength to get my life back and I am so very thankful. In the beginning, it was so hard for me to accept help, but The Shopfront is now like part of my family. There is so much love here and they have cared for me better than any mother could. Whilst I am now back on my feet, I still visit here occasionally to get a dose of that TLC and to see my friends".

EDITOR'S NOTE: The name and certain details in the above have been changed to protect the privacy and of the visitor, however, the words are those expressed by the individual interviewed.

The Shopfront relies heavily on volunteers and community support, tell us about that please?

The lifeblood of The Shopfront is our wonderful volunteers and those who support us. They are the most magnificent people, they really are. They give so much of themselves, more than I could ever ask for. They are more accepting, more understanding of the 'quirks' which some of the visitors to our centre may have. We have about 65 volunteers each week from a total pool of about 150 generous people.

They are aged from their low 20s, to into their 80s... in fact, many are in their 70s and 80s. Predominantly, most volunteers are from our Catholic parishes; that being said, we also have members from the Jewish and Buddhist communities. We also have many teachers from our Catholic schools and staff from CEWA (Catholic Education WA) who come to serve during our evenings.

If anyone is interested in volunteering at The Shopfront, for a few hours once a week, once a month or whatever, they can contact me directly or look on our website for information. We'd love to hear from them. All you need is a smile and be willing to help in whatever way you feel comfortable doing.



If there was a school, parish, business or individual wanting to contribute to The Shopfront, what sort of things do you need?

Our Catholic parishes are already so generous in providing canned goods, blankets, toiletries and food, as are our Catholic schools and CEWA. We also work closely with Foodbank and other similar groups. We of course have some truly marvellous businesses which are vital to The Shopfront, for example, Mondo Butchers. **Vince Garreffa and his wife Anna (Mondo Butchers)** have been supplying meat to The Shopfront for years and years. Mondo Butchers probably saves The Shopfront around \$500- \$600 each week as a result of its generous provisions. Truly, Vince is simply fantastic and he'll probably hate that I even thank him in this newsletter.

What's the best and worst thing about your job?

The best thing about my job is most definitely the people - our staff, volunteers and visitors. I get such joy... I come alive when I talk with them.

The hardest part about the job is the people (laughs). Because we are so small in number and so busy all the time, there is a lot of demand on me to be available for everyone, and that can be challenging at times.

If I could grant you one wish for The Shopfront, what might that be?

Well are you wearing you LifeLink Manager's hat, then we'd like more money (laughs). The one thing we desperately need is space. We need larger, more suitable premises to more professionally deliver support for our visitors. This is needed now but it is most certainly going to be of even greater need in the future as we receive more and more calls for help.

So that's my prayer, that's my wish.