

Archbishop's Christmas Appeal for LifeLink 2019

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB,
Archbishop of Perth

EMERGING FROM 'THE DARK WINTER'

-Bill's Story-

Bill (48) sits and chats with me in the garden area at The Shopfront. Sipping a hot Milo, although shy and a little nervous about doing so, he wants to share his story so we can all better understand the struggle of people living on the streets, and those affected by mental health issues.

Bill said, "My spiral downwards began way back in 1997. I owned a business as a successful tattoo artist, was married to a wonderful woman and we had two young children. I didn't know it, but I'd been battling depression and anxiety for ages and it was getting worse. In such a short period of time, I lost everything – my business, my wife, my family. Brought up by my grandparents, who I loved a great deal, my conditioned worsened in 2002 when my grandmother passed away. I felt so alone, unable to work or function.

I spent the next ten years fighting every day just to find the will to live. I was completely frozen inside. Lost. With no home of my own, I couch-surfed from one friend's place to the next. It was awful. Sometimes I'd be well enough to work on farms down south and earn some money. But this was rare. Eventually, I moved in with an estranged Uncle who took me in and he gave me a job in his business.

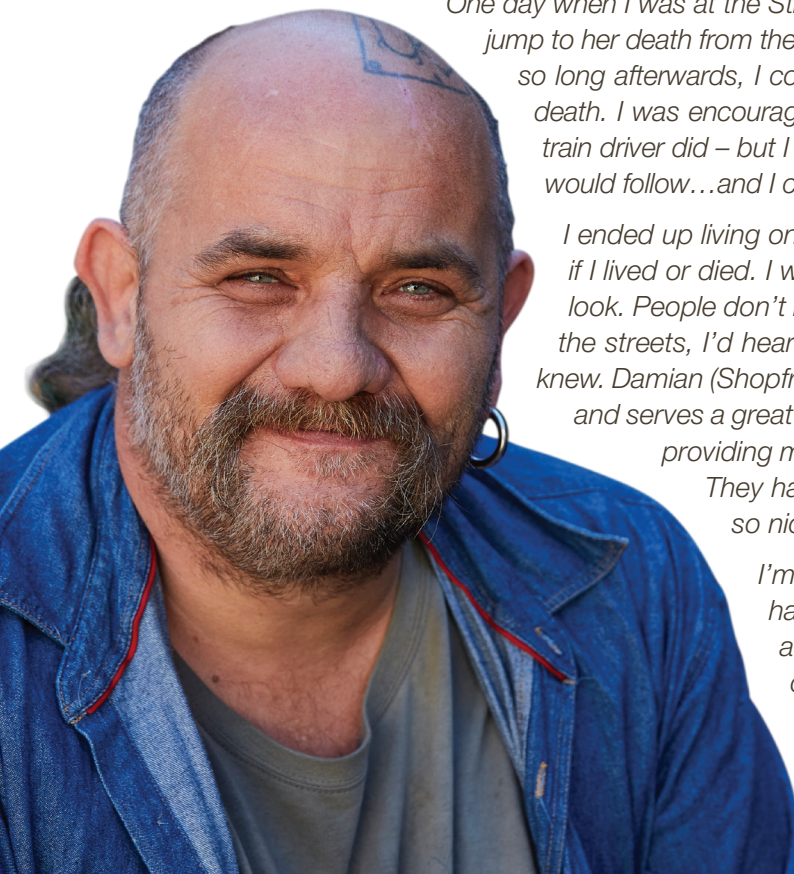
One day when I was at the Stirling train station on my way to work, I witnessed a young girl jump to her death from the bridge. I'll never forget what I saw that day, it was horrific. For so long afterwards, I couldn't leave the house as I just had this mental image of her death. I was encouraged by a social worker to seek counselling – the same as the train driver did – but I couldn't as I knew if that 'hook' came out, all the other hooks would follow...and I couldn't stand it.

I ended up living on the streets of Perth for more than 2 years, not really caring if I lived or died. I wasn't bothered too much because of my size and the way I look. People don't realise I'm really just a softie when they look at me. Whilst on the streets, I'd heard about The Shopfront. I started visiting with other friends I knew. Damian (Shopfront's Director) is a wonderful guy. He is always so welcoming and serves a great cup of Milo, which I love. The Shopfront has been fantastic – providing me a meal when I need it or groceries when I have no money.

They have helped with referrals and advice. All the people here are so nice. It's like a home!

I'm not sure how or why, but one day I thought to myself – I have to get living again. My social worker found me temporary accommodation at 55 Central (a male crisis accommodation centre) and I was prescribed new medication for my depression and anxiety. Slowly, the thawing of the dark winter occurred.

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Today, I have my own unit I live in and take care of myself. I like to paint which has helped release some of the dark feelings I had inside me. When I see people on the streets, I tell them about The Shopfront. I want them to know that they are not alone and there are good people out there who are there for them – no matter what."

I ask Bill what his dream for the future is. His response is both humbling and inspirational.

"I just want to continue to get better, to live my life and be happy. Don't laugh, but I'd really like to do gardening. I guess it would be hard to find a job like that given the way I look and at my age, but I'd love someone to give me a go."

Every year, The Shopfront welcomes more than 25,000 visits from people who are homeless or struggling with their own battles. It continues to respond to these calls for help, thanks largely to your generous support of the Archbishop's Christmas Appeal for LifeLink.

THE SHOPFRONT RESPONDING TO ^{Real} NEED



We recently visited **The Shopfront** to chat with Dr Terry Wilson, Archdiocesan Vicar for Social Outreach, and Mr Damian Walsh, Director of The Shopfront, to find out more about the work of this agency... and to hear some exciting news.

The Shopfront began in a small rented space in Whatley Crescent, Maylands, in 2002. It was a welcoming place for about fifteen (15) homeless people who 'visited' each day. They came to share a cuppa, some food, some companionship and enjoy respite from their daily struggle. Word quickly spread on the streets and demand increased. In 2004, The Shopfront relocated just down the road to its current premises.

Today, more than 65 visitors each day are welcomed to The Shopfront. In total, more than 25,000 people call on the agency for assistance each year. It continues to be the warm, welcoming place that it has always been for people who are struggling in the community.

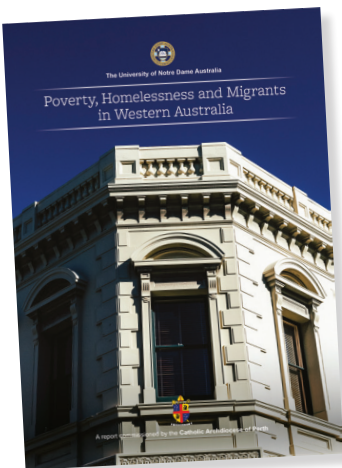
Visitors are still served a light lunch, but they also have access to a wide variety of services and assistance. The Shopfront responds to calls for food hampers, crisis accommodation and emergency help. A doctor from Homeless Healthcare visits each week, providing much-needed healthcare, prescriptions and basic medical care.

The Orange Sky Laundry visits each week so people who are homeless can have their clothes cleaned and dried right there at the Centre. Centrelink has recently resumed fortnightly visits to help visitors with welfare payments advice.

"Whilst the majority of our visitors are people who are homeless the majority of new people we've seen this year – almost 300 so far – are people who are struggling financially. Every story is different of course – some are struggling due to a loss of employment; some are from New Zealand or are refugees and they receive absolutely zero income support from Government. Others are battling alcohol or drug addiction," said Damian.



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"The number of people sleeping rough – those who we classify as truly homeless – hasn't changed a great deal over the past few years. This is reiterated in the release recently of the report "Poverty, Homelessness and Migrants in Western Australia" commissioned by the Archdiocese (as part of the Archdiocese's Strategic Plan implementation) and compiled by the University of Notre Dame Australia.

What has changed significantly are the number of people sleeping in cars and caravans, or couch surfing with family and friends, or living in unstable circumstances where they have accommodation this week, but not the next. There are an incredibly large number of people facing this every day. These are the people we are supporting here at The Shopfront – with food hampers; they come here during the day to eat something, for advice, for referrals, for help.

You know if you asked twenty (20) people to identify a homeless person, if they saw someone with a sleeping bag or sleeping inside their doorway, then homelessness is obvious. But people wandering around the streets who have stored their bedding in their car or at a friend's place, then I doubt they'd be recognised as homeless.

These are the 'invisible' transient homeless people we are seeing more and more at The Shopfront.

The wait list for "emergency government housing" is now three (3) years. Three years when your needs are already considered an emergency! If you have a young family and you're middle aged, it will likely take up to five (5) years. The single greatest issue we have is the availability of suitable accommodation at a reasonable cost," explained Damian.



Q We understand The Shopfront has some exciting news to share?

"Yes, we are truly delighted to share the news that the Archdiocese has recently purchased a permanent new home for The Shopfront.

The property is located in John Street, Bentley, and plans for the construction of a purpose built Centre are just about finalised. Work should commence by September 2019 and all being well, we should be ready to welcome Visitors from Easter 2020," said Dr Wilson.

Q So why the big move?

***"It's all based on responding to need.** We've simply outgrown our Whatley Crescent home and it doesn't meet the needs of the increased number of people we are welcoming to The Shopfront. To be honest, this property isn't in a great condition either and doesn't provide suitable counselling rooms for people's privacy. There isn't appropriate storage, security, or access for deliveries. It's challenging for Orange Sky Laundry and others to deliver services here," responded Damian.*

Q What was important when looking for a new home for The Shopfront?

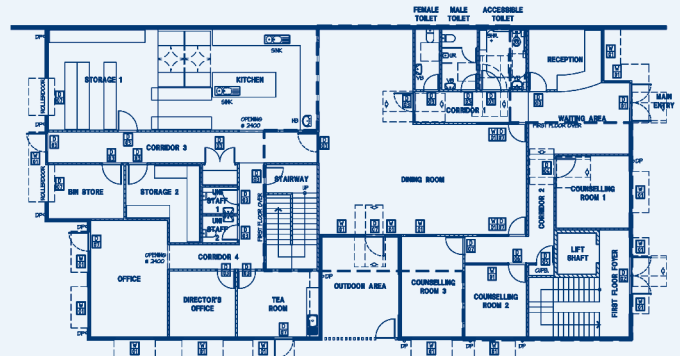
"When it was realised that this property was no longer 'fit for purpose' we set about looking for somewhere located close to a railway line and within 3 to 4 stops from the CBD, as this is the main method of travel for those struggling financially. A significant factor was the demographics of need as I like to call it...where are the people who reach out to us for help coming from?"

Ultimately, we were directed by the excellent research contained in the Notre Dame report which clearly showed that the greatest number of people requiring help – today and in the future – is located on the Armadale line. In its new location, our own further research showed, The Shopfront will be the only organisation providing services for homeless people in that geographical area, people who in many cases are being 'missed' at the moment," explained Dr Wilson.

Q So can you tell us about the new Shopfront?

"We are so excited about what our new home will deliver. Firstly, it doubles the amount of space we have available and will allow us to separate out the various functions of the Centre. The new Shopfront will provide:

- ▶ *Full accessibility for people with disabilities.*
- ▶ *3 x private counselling/interview rooms.*
- ▶ *An office for the Director and a staff/volunteer room.*
- ▶ *A purpose built dining room and service canteen, with proper food storage facilities.*
- ▶ *A secure waiting area.*
- ▶ *Outdoor garden and courtyard areas for visitors to relax and share time with each other.*
- ▶ *A significant increase in storage area for donated clothes, blankets, toiletries, food stuffs etc.*
- ▶ *At the rear of the property, there will be secure parking for the visiting Homeless Healthcare GP, for Orange Sky Laundry to set up, for visiting Centrelink personnel. It will be an additional service area for other organisations which are helping people in need," said Damian.*



Q Terry, what is the cost of this new home for The Shopfront?

"The Archdiocese of Perth, the Church, has invested approximately \$2 million in providing both the land and building. The building will have a second floor however this will be retained by the Archdiocese for either future expansion or other Archdiocesan social service.

The Church sees this as an important investment in reaching out to help people in need within the community, people who in many cases may have fallen through the gaps and not received help previously... or have been unable to access help.

Whilst a significant undertaking, it reinforces the commitment the Church has in this Archdiocese to fulfilling our collective mission of being 'a people walking together in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd'.

It is through service, reaching out with love and compassion to our brothers and sisters in need, that we live and express our Faith," said Dr Wilson.



A SHARED JOURNEY

Leaving home for the first time can be very exciting but also daunting. People with disability who live in **Identitywa** shared living homes commonly identify the life-changing opportunities to experience independence, make new friends, develop confidence and have the freedom to make personal choices as the absolute best things about moving out of the family home.

Identitywa is one of WA's leading agencies supporting people with disability to live the life they choose. Over 145 people currently live in one of the 38 shared living houses located across the Perth metropolitan area.

For family and carers, the knowledge their loved one is happy, and living a fulfilled life in a safe and supported environment, can also offer them a newfound independence. For the first time in a long time, they can feel confident about the future.

Identitywa has a strong commitment to Person Centred Active Support. Staff work in partnership with individuals to explore, plan and design support options to suit their individual needs and assist them to achieve their aspirations and personal goals.

We'd like to share with you Bailey and Alex's experiences, and how shared living and Identitywa has made such a positive impact in their lives.

WELCOME TO BAILEY'S PLACE

A passion for fixing bikes and computers, and making his own decisions are just some of the things that make 19-year-old Bailey really happy ...along with eating pizza! Bailey recently moved out of his family home to one of Identitywa's shared living houses, and he loves it.

"It was a bit hard at the beginning because I missed my family, but that's ok. It's really good when we get together," he said.



Bailey says he really likes being independent and making his own choices. *"I go bike riding every day, work on rebuilding old computers and I just love fixing things. I can do what I like to do, when I want to do it. At the moment I am building a go cart from old bike parts. I also do some part-time work which helps me buy things from the hobby shop which is my favourite place to go,"* he said.

Bailey and his family have been supported by Identitywa for over 11 years. Identitywa Team Leader Kathy said: *"Bailey is someone who is highly motivated to achieve a great result. He is meticulous about what he is doing and he puts a huge amount of enthusiasm into everything he does."*



ALEX'S STORY CONTINUED ON **P6**

TEAM ALEX MAKES A BIG IMPACT!



Over the past two years, Alex's life has changed significantly as he moved out of his family home for the first time and now lives in one of Identitywa's shared houses. He has achieved a level of independence that his parents, Andrew and Sue, hoped he would one day.

"It is very clear that he loves his new life because whenever we take him out, which is quite regularly, he absolutely can't wait to get back!"

It is really fantastic to see him so **happy** and **comfortable** with his housemates and the **wonderful staff** who support him," said Sue.

For Andrew and Sue, the search for the right support provider was literally quite life-changing as they were prepared to move state to find it. *"We moved to Western Australia from the Northern Territory because WA offered high quality disability support and funding. You could say we shopped around and were delighted we found Identitywa,"* explained Sue.

It was with one of the Identitywa planners and others close to their family, including Alex's godparents and grandmother, that 'Team Alex' was founded in early 2017 to support Andrew and Sue as they worked on the best plan for Alex's future, which is funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Team Alex met with the NDIS planner in April 2017 to discuss Alex's individual needs and how his future could be funded. *"It was quite funny at the first meeting as they had to arrange for a bigger meeting room to accommodate us all. We definitely needed the support of those who knew Alex best as we wanted to make sure we covered all his individual needs in the NDIS plan,"* said Sue.

Andrew and Sue say they are delighted with how the initial meeting went and all the following meetings over the past two years, which have been to review Alex's plan. *"Our experience with the NDIS has been extremely positive and we are very pleased with all that has transpired. It has been a wonderful outcome for all our family. Alex is really happy in his new home and, as his parents, we couldn't ask for more!"* said Andrew.