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news

Enrolment avalanche hits Cairns Corps

By Cliff Worthing

A lot of people are wanting to call Cairns Corps home, according to Corps Officer Major Ben Johnson.

Corps membership has recently grown by 21, including 13 senior soldiers and eight adherents, who were enrolled in three separate ceremonies. It started on 19 March when six soldiers were enrolled. The eight adherents were enrolled on Easter Sunday (9 April), and then another seven soldiers joined the ranks on Pentecost Sunday (28 May).



Adherents enrolled on 9 April (from left) Jacqueline Macomi, Alfonze Nsengiyaremye, Shrahon Gazmer, Abishek Gazmere, Rodha Rasaily, Jupi Biswa.

"Seeing fresh, young, smiling faces in crisp new uniforms brings a tear to the eye," Ben said. "Half our new soldiers are teenagers, and they are so fired up!"

The rush of enrolments is a product of four years of intentional mission strategy by the corps, especially with the local refugee population. About 100 people from refugee backgrounds attend the corps weekly, which is about half the congregation.

"We have helped our refugees slowly integrate into community and the corps by providing a space for music, culture and food," Ben said. "They want a place to belong, then a reason to believe, which then eventually leads to change in behaviour. It's really important for us to get the order and process right."

The corps' Just Brass group has about 23 participants, mostly refugees. Most of them have progressed to attending the corps youth group or Kids Zone and worship services.



Senior soldiership enrolment on 28 May (from left) Major Ben Johnson, Marie Johnson, Philip Warr, Esther Gikundiro, Lofena Korua, Francine Ikireza, Sorange Perusi, Claudine Nantebuka, Major Ragana Gumuna (flagbearer).

"Our approach is to invest in the youth and children, and the parents see the value in what we do," Ben said. "It's intentional. It's not rocket science, and it's something that is working!"

The corps understands they need to incorporate a trauma-informed approach to their engagement with refugees. Many have experienced family violence, sexual assaults, and sometimes physical mutilation through the horrors of war.

"There is a whole lot of heartache and lots of trauma in their stories," Ben said. "Even though they can now enjoy freedom, the scars are still there even though some have experienced miraculous healing."

Creating an opportunity to worship and serve has certainly paid dividends for the corps. "They have really brought innovation and energy into the Cairns community and into our corps," Ben said.



Senior soldiership enrolment on 19 March at Cairns Corps (from left) Major Ben Johnson, Tahlia Johnson (front), Kimazi Heretier (back), Tumayini Munguyiko, Joseph, Odette Nyiramirimo, Patrick Mugisha, Major Ragana Gumuna (flagbearer).

news



Major Karen Elkington says a new visa status can mean starting afresh for those waiting to fully enter the community after arriving by boat.

New visa status gives asylum seekers a fresh start

By Kirralee Nicolle

The timely enactment of Labor Government commitments to provide Resolution of Status (RoS) visas to those waiting in limbo would completely transform the lives of many who came to Australia seeking asylum, a Salvation Army refugee worker says.

Immigration minister Andrew Giles announced on 13 February 2023 that the Albanese government would fulfil an election promise to move Temporary Protection visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise visa (SHEV) holders onto permanent visas.

The new RoS visa status would apply to eligible candidates who entered the country as unauthorised maritime arrivals between 13 August 2012 and the end of December 2013, before the introduction of the Operation Sovereign Borders initiative.

Brunswick Asylum Seeker and Refugee Service manager Major Karen Elkington said many of those she worked with at the centre had been living on very minimal incomes, with no access to Medicare, Centrelink or other government services. She said many relied on charity to survive, and while some had applied for refugee status due to changes in the Migration Act, many claims had been rejected.

"Those people are basically languishing in the community," Karen said.

She said some of those she worked with had approached

her to ask how the new visa status might change their situation.

"I said [to them] your life would literally change overnight," she said. "It means people's lives start afresh. It means that children who haven't been able to access higher education can. It means that people with disabilities can access the NDIS."

Karen said one young man at the centre had come to Australia with his family as a young boy but was now studying at university and unable to access government study support.

"If all of a sudden he gets a resolution of status visa, that means he can be like an Australian or an Australian citizen or someone here on a permanent refugee visa," she said. "[He] can actually apply for the loan."

Karen said once he began to look for a graduate job, he would also have trouble finding work because of his visa status.

She said while official data on how many visas had been issued was still to be released, some of those she knew who were on temporary visas had been able to obtain RoS visas, but others were finding the process lengthy and challenging.

"I think it was the Minister's intention that it would be a fairly quick process; however, it's still taking some time," she said. The turnaround has been rather quick for some people, whereas [for] other people, it's just taking a little bit longer.

"It would be lovely to see the government get through it [all] in 12 months. That would be absolutely magic."

feature



Major Jeff Waller and two of the Salisbury Salvos Stores team in Adelaide's north –Anne and Kylie (store manager).

More in store for chaplain Jeff

By Anthony Castle

The Salvation Army provides material and physical support in a range of ways but also provides spiritual support through its chaplaincy services.

Chaplains minister in different environments throughout Australia and provide pastoral care and practical support to staff, volunteers and community members.

Major Jeff Waller is a chaplain with Salvos Stores, offering care and support across South Australia in this role for the past four years.

"I visit the stores and connect with staff and volunteers in each location," says Jeff. "I visit rural stores about three times a year, and more if needed. If a store wants me, I can be there the next day. The main thing is being able to present a safe and confidential space. While many of our stores are passionate about The Salvation Army and raise funds to do the work, I'm able to bring support and care for them."

Jeff started his working life as a tradesperson. Originally from Waverley Temple Corps in Melbourne, he became a Salvation Army officer and served in places like Greenwith, Campbelltown, Bendigo and Mildura.

"I've been an officer for 25 years, but I was a boilermaker and a welder for about 10 years," Jeff explains. "As a young guy growing up in the church, I had a sense of calling. Probably like anyone, I wrestled with it. Those years in a trade allowed me to grow up, though, to work with diverse people and that life experience was foundational."

Chaplaincy is a free and confidential service, and chaplains are listeners who respect the cultures and religious traditions of those who seek help. Jeff oversees 43 Salvos Stores across South Australia, connecting with people from the metro region to places like Whyalla to Mount Gambier.

"I'm providing pastoral care and support to the stores, doing everything we can to get broader information out there," Jeff says. "I make our store customers and

staff aware of what the local Salvation Army offers and advocate for the services in corps and social. We can be a conduit, sending people along to kids club, companion club, parenting programs, Doorways, youth homelessness – all the various ministries and services that corps offer."

In addition to supporting stores, chaplains can support Salvos Stores personnel, including HR, administration staff, area managers, and warehouse and logistics staff.

"Our managers can have conversations with their staff, but that isn't always easy when it comes to significant pastoral care," Jeff explains. "When you're running a retail store with a team of 30-40 volunteers, it makes a huge difference for the manager to be able to hand a person over to me to provide pastoral care and support."

The role of a chaplain is quite broad and varied, and services may include pastoral care, advocacy, counselling, spiritual guidance, or whatever assistance people might need.

"There was a teenager who came into one store, a volunteer who wasn't travelling well and couldn't afford his medication," Jeff explains. "It was a simple prescription, so the store manager and myself assisted him in getting it filled. Within a fortnight, there was a radical transformation in this guy's wellbeing. When his pushbike was stolen, half a dozen of us at the store chipped in and got him a bike and a helmet."

While Salvos Stores chaplains build functional relationships with The Salvation Army's social programs and corps centres, community engagement is an integral part of the mission, with many opportunities to do much more than refer to services.

"For that young man, to face those challenges, it was the end of the world," Jeff explains. "But the change we've seen in his headspace has been huge. He's really turned a corner. The store has been able to meet him where he's at, with a transformation as real as any you can see in a church. The store is much more than just a store."

viewpoint



Sharing life and struggles with other men can bring healing.

Sharing hidden pain can bring healing and hope

By Anthony Castle

There are things we don't share with others.

There are things we don't speak about, that we hide, even from those close to us. These might be things we typically keep private, ordinary things. Sometimes we might hide how we feel about our lives, our relationships, or memories of past events.

We keep these things to ourselves because we might not know how to share them. Perhaps our problems run deeper than others suspect. Maybe we have regrets or feel shame for the things we have done or the things that have been done to us. Perhaps the thought of sharing these things seems painful, or we may feel unsure of how others will respond, but the things we keep secret aren't necessarily about excluding others. We keep secrets to feel safe.

Each June, Men's Health Week raises awareness around the issues men face, particularly mental health challenges. The theme for this year is Healthy Habits, encouraging men to form habits that build wellbeing, but the reality is that men are struggling with mental health in Australia. Men make up an average of seven out of every nine suicides each day.

The data shows that a quarter of Australian men will experience a diagnosed mental health disorder in their lifetime, but only 25 per cent of men will seek help from a mental health professional. Of those men who had contacted a GP, only 40 per cent had seen a mental health professional. Men are not sharing about their mental health challenges enough or seeking the supports that can help. We often keep secrets to feel safe, but for some men, it's the secrets that are dangerous.

"We often keep secrets to feel safe, but for some men, it's the secrets that are dangerous."

I have known enough men who have been hurt by the

things they didn't share when what was kept inside became too much. I have known men who haven't known how to speak about their unhappiness until it tore their lives apart. I have known men who kept their darkest parts hidden. Men who didn't seek professional help. Men who are no longer here. In some ways, I was one of these men. Over the years, I have had to learn how to share things, things I have kept on the inside, seeking out professional help when I need it.

Throughout this process, a Scripture verse has come to mind, from James 5:16; confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. I have thought about this verse from time to time, though not because mental health struggles are sinful or because we can just 'pray away' diagnosed depression and anxiety. We can't, and in many cases, the Church can spiritualise mental health and cause harm to those who need professional help. I remember this verse because I have come to see confession as an important idea, in as much as sharing what is hidden with others can bring some healing. It can save lives.

There are two questions I have found myself asking others over the years, healthy habits I practise with men when I can see they are struggling on the inside. I ask, 'Do you want to talk?' and 'Have you shared this with a professional who can help?'

There are many things we don't share with others, and while we often keep secrets to feel safe, the danger of hiding our mental health struggles is all too real. In a country where twice as many men die by suicide each year than on the roads, we need to make a habit of sharing about mental health. The dark things that are kept inside are often best shared, brought out into the light, with others who can help.

MensLine Australia **1300 78 99 78**. Mensline offers free professional 24/7 telephone counselling support for men with concerns about mental health, anger management, family violence (using and experiencing), addiction, relationships, stress and wellbeing.

story of hope

Sean comes 'full circle' at Shire Salvos

By Sean Nolan

I was led to the Lord by David Soper [Salvation Army Major, now retired]. He was a really big influence in my life. I grew up in a broken home, and he became very close to me and led me to the Lord.

Me and Mark Soper [now Shire Salvos Mission Leader] were best friends in high school. The Sopers were like a second family to me. We used to say – me and a group of other boys – that David Soper showed us a form of Christianity that wasn't mind-numbingly boring!

I remember playing cricket in the street during our high school days and Mark was beating me and I was swearing. And Shelley [Major Shelley Soper, now retired] came out and, really nicely, said, "Sean, why are you swearing like that? That's not how we speak." It was the first time someone had disciplined me without screaming at me, because my dad, in particular, would do that.

When I was 21, I went to America and did a Salvos summer camp. I stayed with the Salvos 'Ground Zero' coordinators in Long Island for a bit and did that summer camp for three months. That was a really formative time in my life. I've always had a real connection to the Salvos.

My salvation was a process. Earlier on, I was back and forward with God and my ebb and flow could be correlated to the circumstances I was facing in life. My father was difficult, and he would get sick and abusive. At one point, I was off the rails again, working as a bar manager, and in a very unhealthy place. It's not an understatement to say that David Soper saved my life. He stepped in and, spiritually, he led me to the Lord, but in a practical way, he saved my life. He showed me that the ultimate purpose in life was to serve the Kingdom of God, so I left everything else and followed after that.



Sean Nolan (centre) says Major David Soper (left) and Mark Soper have been huge influences on his life.

From there, my life turned around and I became a church planter for 18 years.

One of the highlights was when I organised all the youth and young adult ministers from all the protestant denominations in Sydney to come together to meet and pray. We began to do that, and it culminated a few years ago with a big prayer summit at The Salvation Army headquarters in Redfern and [the then Premier] Gladys Berejiklian came to that. We had this amazing day where all youth directors came together, and all denominations were represented.

Around that time, I was starting my doctorate degree, and it sent me on a journey. I really felt like there was something wrong in the Church. The Bible promises power and it promises all these things for our evangelism and our outreach. However, I don't think you would meet any pastors who would say that this time in history is marked by great power in the Church. So, it's not a problem on God's end. It must be at our end.

The book that I wrote, *Searching for God in Christianity*, which is just being released now, came out of that journey.

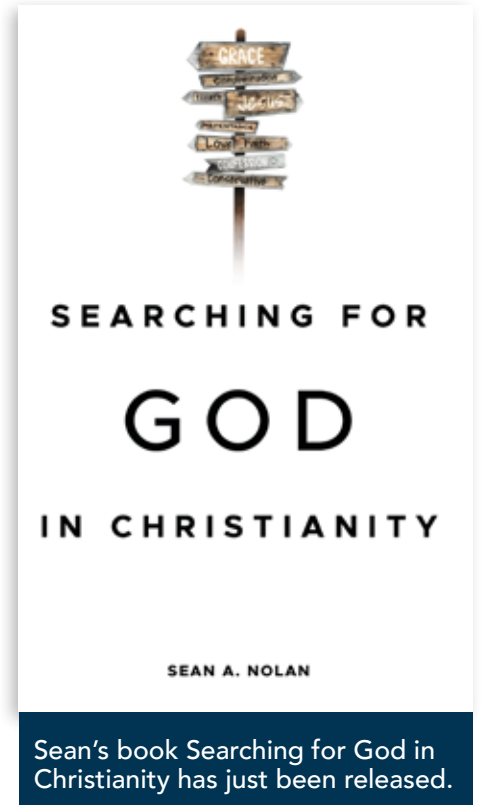
I had pastored/church-planted three churches and during the COVID pandemic, I finished up at the last one and was accepted into the PhD program at Sydney College of Divinity. So, I finished up my pastorate and entered the doctoral program, which gave me more time to write both a dissertation and this new book. We live in Western Sydney, but we are planning on moving to the Sutherland Shire and setting up with our family.

I hadn't worshipped in the Salvos, but I was led to the Lord by the Salvos so when we were looking for a church in the Shire, and Mark Soper was there, it was a no-brainer to join Shire Salvos.

There is definitely a sense of 'coming home', in the sense of being there [worshipping] with the Sopers, because they are like a second family to me.

As told to Lauren Martin

Sean's book, *'Searching for God in Christianity'* is available at Koorong and all major online bookstores



army archives

From a woman of despair to one of grace

Earlier this year, the Maitland & Beyond Family History society hosted its first Female Convict Seminar: The Female Convicts of Maitland and the Hunter Valley. The venue was Maitland Gaol in the NSW Hunter region, a fitting site as many of the female convicts whose stories were being told were inmates of the gaol at some time. At the seminar, three society members gave presentations about three local female convicts. One of those stories was of Mary Fitzgerald, aka Poll Cott, which was researched and presented by Chris Barrett.

Mary Fitzgerald was baptised in Cork City, Ireland, in 1819. At 17, Mary, a country servant who could read and write, was convicted of stealing cheese. She was sentenced to seven years' transportation to Australia for her crime and arrived on board the 'Sir Charles Forbes' in August 1837.

Mary Fitzgerald married James Cott, also a convict, in 1839 at Newcastle. Mary's life was complete; she was happily married and had a child whom she adored. This happiness lasted until 1847 when, despite the best efforts of a doctor who was called, baby James died. Baby James Cott was buried at Hiland Crescent Cemetery, East Maitland. Mary, "... worn out with debauch, faint with hunger and unsteady under the influence of incessant potations, would lay for hours, sometimes whole nights, across the grave of her baby boy, seeking somehow to contact him by tapping a long thin steel rod down on the coffin ..." [Local Newspaper Article]

After her son died, Mary's behaviour spiralled out of control, and she became intimately acquainted with a gaol cell. When Mary's husband left her, she was truly alone. She became known as Poll (Polly meaning 'great sorrow'). Driven by grief, anger, desolation and probably despair, Poll had hundreds of incarcerations in Maitland, Newcastle and Parramatta gaols for drunkenness, obscene language, vagrancy, assault, stealing and property damage, but the most heart-wrenching was admission to Maitland Gaol for the offence of lunacy. She was transferred to Tarban Creek Lunatic Asylum in 1874.

For the next 38 years, her incarcerations continued to the point where she had her own quarters at Maitland Gaol. Numerous newspaper articles of the day mention the hesitancy of the constabulary to approach her and publicans complying with Poll's requests for liquor to avoid retribution. Her weapon of choice was a lemonade bottle inside a stocking, which she would wield with menace. This humble bottle is on display at The Salvation Army Museum in Sydney.

In 1885, a chance meeting with a Salvation Army officer, Captain Rundle, changed Poll's life when he said to her: "God bless you, Mother". Captain Rundle offered Poll a bed and food for the night, which Poll accepted. Poll woke in the early hours to find Captain Rundle and his wife praying for her soul. This simple act of kindness and

the power of prayer changed Mary's life. She became a Salvationist on 18 May 1885 and devoted the remainder of her life to The Salvation Army. In 1895, a pamphlet published by The Salvation Army entitled "Poll Cott-A-Tale of a Termagant" was circulated, and her story was told at meetings and gatherings for many years. The pamphlet states it was "published by The Salvation Army to illustrate the successful work amongst the utterly godless".



Poll Cott, who found salvation in 1885.
Photo coloured by Sandy Turnbull.

Mary died on 13 July 1905 at The Salvation Army Rescue Home, Albert St, Islington (Newcastle). She was buried on 15 July 1905 in the Sandgate Cemetery.

Researcher Chris Barrett says Poll's story is one of survival, resilience and courage and shows us that strong women aren't born; they are forged in the fires they have had to walk through. "She is a beacon of hope to all women, especially those who have been marginalised, reviled or abused. She is an inspirational woman and heroine of Maitland and the Hunter!"

One of the highlights was a display of 1000 Maitland Female Convict Bonnet Collection. The Maitland Female Convict Bonnet Project is part of the 'Roses from the Heart' Bonnet Project, an initiative of Dr Christina Henri in Tasmania. For the past five years, the Maitland society has been researching the female convicts connected to Maitland and making bonnet tributes for each.