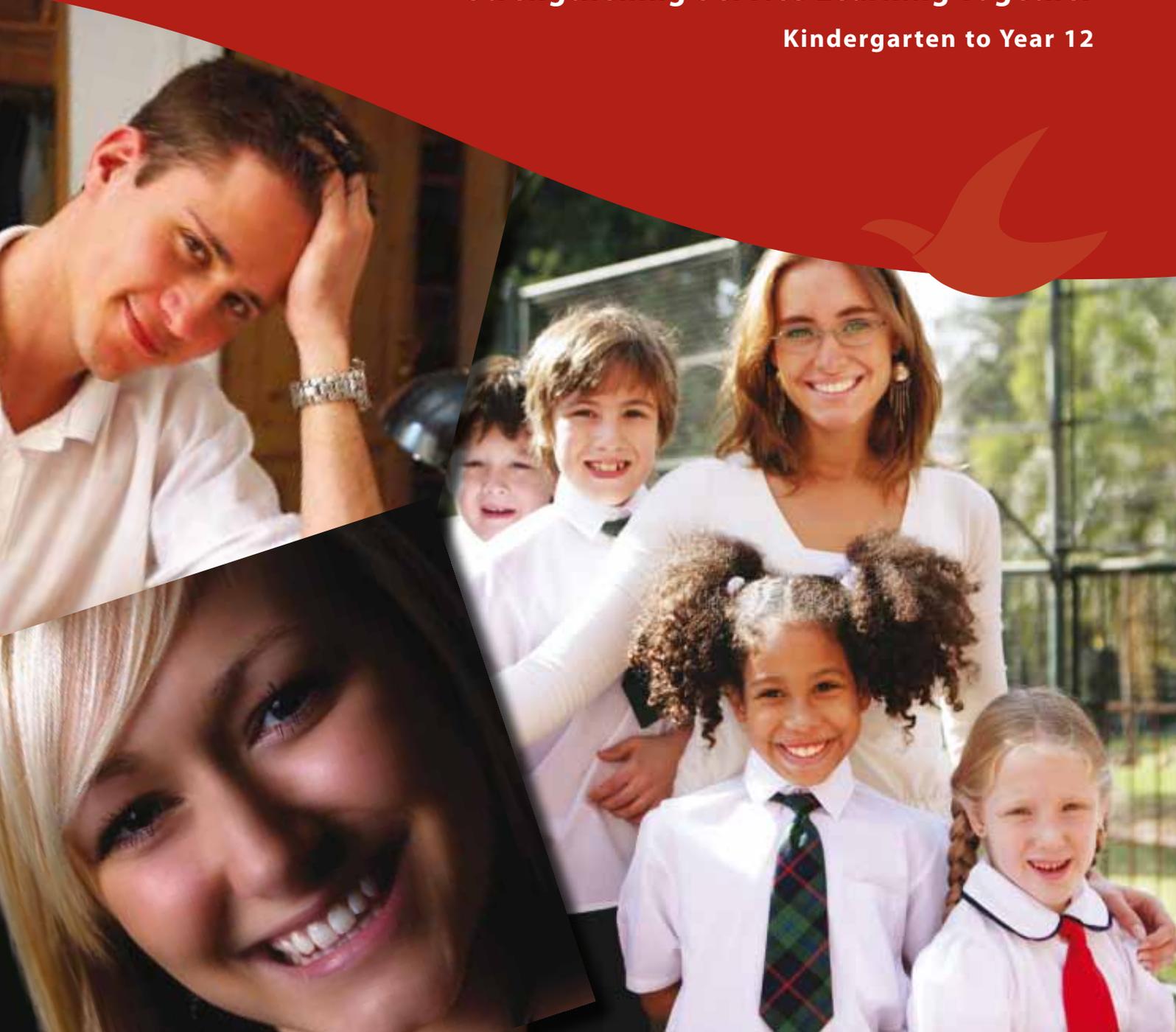




# School Teacher's Booklet

**Strengthening Service Learning Together**

**Kindergarten to Year 12**



## INTRODUCTION

Schools have a long history of engaging students in community service activity and fundraising. While our community benefits in the short term from these endeavours, the long term benefits lie in a teacher's opportunity to influence the levels of community awareness, empathy and social-responsibility in each new generation of citizens. For the purpose of this booklet, this aspect of student learning is called *Service Learning*.

Schools can optimise their contribution to *Service Learning* by:

- Integrating *Service Learning* experiences across the K to 12 curriculum so that these qualities grow overtime, leading up to and continuing after the formalised community service requirement of the West Australian Certificate of Education.
- Using industry support to help students connect deeply with the issue being explored, and allowing time for students to personally reflect on the issue through critical thinking and discussion or the completion of a curriculum assessment activity.

This booklet summarises a number of themes of local community need in which UnitingCare West is actively involved.

UnitingCare West is willing to support schools to use these themes to achieve quality *Service Learning* for students within existing or new school activities by:

- Assisting in the design and implementation of projects that fit into the K to 12 curriculum goals.
- Providing (where possible) industry information, guest speakers or stories to enhance *Service Learning*.

This booklet has been produced in response to suggestions by Uniting Church schools and with input from Uniting Church schools. We hope that it will be a useful resource to teachers wishing to work with us to strengthen *Service Learning*.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the Sangora Foundation for funding this booklet.

We wish to thank the following Uniting Church schools for their contribution of enthusiasm, ideas, information and prayers for this booklet, and for their continuing commitment to work together to the benefit of students and our community.



# School Teacher's Booklet

Strengthening Service Learning Together

Kindergarten to Year 12

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Use this book to obtain:

- An overview of some of the disadvantages faced by West Australians.
- Ideas for student and school contributions that may assist you in identifying ways to incorporate the themes into your student program.
- Prayers that can be used to support student's personal reflection.
- Potential *Service Learning* messages that could be highlighted to students.
- Where to phone for more information or assistance in incorporating a theme into your student program.

*You may be interested in a theme but find none of the ideas are suitable to your subject area or age group of students. Still give us a call, we are happy to see if we can help design something suitable.*

In order to ensure we can work effectively together, please always call us to discuss your project prior to it starting.

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A person caring for a family member with a severe disability may have limited capacity to be employed.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

### THE ISSUE

Being socially connected and involved in meaningful activity is a fundamental need of all people. These things are commonly suggested to affect mental health and wellbeing.

For most adults, employment or caring for their family and involvement in sporting or recreational pursuits fulfils these needs. A person with a disability however may find these needs harder to meet.

A disability is any ongoing condition which restricts everyday activity. A disability can result in a substantially reduced capacity for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility plus an increased need for support services<sup>2</sup>. Some people are born with a disability while other people acquire a disability through an injury or illness.

During their school years people with disabilities often have some of their need for social interaction and meaningful daytime activity met through school. These young people sometimes need assistance with social contact and recreation outside of school as their disability makes it difficult for them to join the mainstream activities enjoyed by their peers.

Accessing social and recreational activities may become more challenging for people with disabilities once they have finished school. While some people with disabilities are able to work this is not the reality for everyone.

Those people with disabilities who are not in employment may need someone to be with them during the day. If no other support is available, a family member generally will need to care for the person. This potentially takes that family member out of the workforce and reduces their capacity to attend to their own needs.

### OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West helps these young people and adults by running daytime, weekend and evening group activities tailored to their needs. UnitingCare West is currently assisting over 250 individuals living in the metropolitan area who need this type of assistance.

These services continually have a waiting list. In particular there is demand for services for people who have more complex needs such as a mental illness as well as an intellectual disability.



**PRAYER:** Merciful God, it is not your plan that any person should suffer indignity. We are as varied as the colours of the rainbow - our lives contain so much variety. Forgive us when we only look for beauty and talent and ignore the reality of our diversity. Help us to celebrate our differences and learn again what it means to love one another. Amen.

It can be difficult for some people with disabilities to participate in recreational activities.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$40 will enable one person to enjoy a day of social interaction and recreational activity. \$1000 will enable them to do this fortnightly for a whole year.
- \$125 will fund a meal as part of a recreational evening for 25 adults.
- \$500 will enable 25 teenagers to participate in a social event.
- Craft materials or special activity items like fishing gear or golfing equipment. Please enquire about our current needs.

### Service

- Develop a performance for one or more of the recreational groups.
- Plan and run a craft or sporting activity for one of the recreational groups. Visit the group first to understand how to conduct the activity in a manner that facilitates participation.
- Attend a regular recreational group as a volunteer to provide individual support to a person with a disability.
- In collaboration with UnitingCare West, host a series of recreational activity groups using your school facilities. For example, run a cooking activity one week and then computer, art, music or sporting activities on following fortnights. Use the week between each visit to debrief and plan.
- Arrange for a recreational group to attend a special sporting or cultural event at your school as spectators/audience. Plan how you will host their visit.
- With assistance from their parent, students can take an adult with a disability on an outing such as a morning fishing trip or to a craft fair.

53% of working age people with a disability are employed compared with 81% of people without a disability<sup>1</sup>.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- Being socially connected and involved in meaningful activity is a fundamental need for all people.
- Employment provides many people with more than an income.
- People with disabilities sometimes need assistance to access social networks and to be involved in meaningful activities.



**Interested  
in this theme for your  
school program?  
Call 1300 663 298**

**Industry Information, Speakers, Local Stories,  
Project Ideas & Details**

Teenage mothers are more likely to be low paid or unemployed<sup>4</sup>.

# TEENAGE PARENTHOOD

## THE ISSUE

When a child is born to a teenage mother they both potentially face a difficult future. It is their future however that will in part influence the overall health of our wider community. Will the mother and her child contribute positively to our community? Will they be part of the capable and reliable workforce that is so needed by business?

The facts are that children of teenage mothers are more likely to struggle educationally and socially. They are more likely to drop out of high school or be labelled with behaviour problems, and three times more likely than their peers to be incarcerated<sup>5</sup>.

As for teenage mums, they are less likely to finish school and more likely to be long term unemployed and stay dependent on government housing<sup>4</sup>.

The frequency of births to teenage women in Australia has been decreasing over many years<sup>6</sup>, but it is unlikely that a 100% prevention rate will ever be reached. Each year, approximately 1500 babies are born to women under the age of 19 in Western Australia<sup>3</sup>.

For the teenagers and their children who fall into this group, the support they receive in the early years can influence the extent to which they become an asset to our community.

We know that educational success and employment experience provides teenage mothers and their children with a pathway to a better life. Finishing high school however, or obtaining other qualifications and work experience while caring for a child and dealing with the complexities of teenage parenthood, requires a huge commitment.

## OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West assists teenage mothers to finish their high school education or become trained and employed by UnitingCare West as Peer Educators in a program provided to West Australian high schools.

UnitingCare West has tremendous success in assisting teenage mothers. Over the last 22 years we have celebrated the school graduation of over 300 girls, our learning centre has a 90% student retention rate and a waiting list.

In addition, each year over ten young mothers complete the training to qualify for employment as a UnitingCare West Peer Educator. Each year, these Peer Educators reach over 2000 high school students with their message about the realities of teenage parenthood.



**PRAYER:** Gracious God, we pray for all those who feel their life is ruined by the choices they have made - for those who feel unforgiven and unloved. May we be slow to judge others and quick to support them. Help us to show them your love unreservedly and help them see the choices for life before them.

Amen.

Around 1500 babies are born to women aged 19 and under each year in Western Australia<sup>3</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$45 will enable one high school student to hear first-hand about the realities of teenage parenthood.
- \$100 will help keep educational text books and reference material in the learning centre library current.
- \$450 will help provide computer facilities for teenage mothers to use at the learning centre.
- \$650 will give one teenager 50% of the child care support she requires to complete her training as a UnitingCare West Peer Educator.
- \$1,800 will enable one teenager to complete 25% of their training as a Peer Educator.
- \$4,215 will give one teenage mum the chance to study at UnitingCare West's learning centre for one term.
- New toys, rugs, linen, craft materials and educational resources for use in the learning centre's crèche.

### Service

- Design and implement a community 'donor acquisition' drive for these services.
- Design and implement a project in collaboration with the learning centre to review and update its library resources.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, film, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about this issue.

The children of teenage mothers are more likely to struggle educationally and socially<sup>5</sup>.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- The importance of education.
- An understanding of the challenges faced by teenage mothers and their children.
- Never be afraid of seeking and accepting assistance because with the right support many challenges can be overcome.



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in this theme for your  
school program?  
Call 1300 663 298**

Industry Information, Speakers, Local Stories,  
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Poverty is about more than financial hardship<sup>9</sup>.

# FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND POVERTY

## THE ISSUE

Financial hardship can occur gradually or suddenly and can be short or long term.

Some people have budgets that just don't have the flexibility for something to go wrong. Just one unusually large or unexpected bill triggers a chain reaction, which leads them to a situation where they cannot pay a bill for one essential item like accommodation, unless they go without another essential item like food.

Sometimes it is a low income that is the underlying cause. At the time of the 2006 Census, over 92,000 households in the Perth-Mandurah area were receiving a gross weekly income of less than \$500<sup>7</sup>. At other times, financial hardship is a result of debts that were taken on without a full understanding of the credit arrangements and/or the skills to manage and pay the debt.

Poverty is usually a long term problem which involves financial hardship and additional issues<sup>9</sup>. For example, a particular family may have a low income, but in addition, mum may have a mental illness and little social support from family and friends. Dad, like his father before him may have never held a job, left school early due to learning difficulties and may have issues with drugs and alcohol.

## OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West provides emergency relief and financial counselling services to assist people from across Western Australia who are facing financial hardship. Additionally, UnitingCare West runs a community centre in Merriwa where local families, who are facing a range of social disadvantages in addition to financial hardship, can access support.

Emergency relief most commonly involves providing food, clothing or blankets, or assisting with payment for items like electricity, gas, rent or medicine. Financial counselling is provided to people facing a debt problem or as part of our response to their need for emergency relief.

At the Merriwa centre, families can access advocacy and referral to specialised services or join in programs that enable them to address particular challenges they face. These programs include parenting, cooking, sewing skills groups; homework and community play groups as well as TAFE courses.

Where required, a free crèche is provided to enable parents to access activities.

A breakfast club which serves over 700 meals a month also operates for school children.

Christmas can be an extremely difficult time for people experiencing hardship and poverty as it accentuates security, hope, friendships and family support that are so important, but may be missing from their lives. Each year UnitingCare West's Christmas food and gift hampers help bring the joy of Christmas to many children and families.

**PRAYER:** Loving God, many in our community face unforeseen changes in life. Financial loss, illness, marital breakdown, death of a family member. At such times, we often discover resources are not adequate. It can seem easier to withdraw or feel excluded - but you count us all in. Help us to free our resources so that the suffering and isolation may end.  
Amen.

Over recent years basic household expenses have increased faster than the average West Australian wage<sup>7</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$50 will help feed a small family through to their next pay cheque.
- \$100 will help a family avoid having their power disconnected or provide financial counselling and advocacy to one family.
- \$300 will help a household with rental arrears avoid eviction.
- Gifts and food for Christmas hampers.
- Second hand clothing, bedding and household items. Good Samaritan Industries is a Uniting Church agency with the infrastructure to accept, sort and distribute second-hand items. People needing inexpensive goods can purchase recycled items from the many Good Sammy stores. Please direct second-hand donations to Good Samaritan Industries (08) 9463 0500.

### Service

- Create a set of weekly meal plans for a family on a low income. Cook one of the meals to share as a fundraiser.
- In collaboration with UnitingCare West design and operate a program for families living in Merriwa.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, film, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about this issue.



About one in five Australians with debt are finding repayments difficult<sup>8</sup>.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- The importance of financial literacy.
- People on both low and high incomes can have difficulties with debt.
- With rises in the cost of living, local people on low incomes are finding it harder to maintain a decent standard of living.
- People experiencing poverty need more than 'emergency relief'.
- An understanding of the variety of issues that may contribute to poverty.



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With support, parents who are using substances can reduce the negative effects this can have on their children.

# SUBSTANCE USING PARENTS

## THE ISSUE

Parents understand that young children are dependent on them for their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Where a mum or dad has problematic drug or alcohol use their ability to parent at their full capacity is compromised.

Substance using parents generally lead very complex lives. They often feel overwhelmed by their situation and find it difficult to identify and make the necessary changes to become the parents they would like to be.

Children in these families are more likely to experience low self esteem and are more vulnerable to difficulties at school. Compared to their peers, they are more likely to develop conduct problems and to misuse substances from an earlier age<sup>11</sup>.



## OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West operates an in-home counselling service for parents (with children up to the age of eight) who are concerned about their substance use and would like to create stronger relationships with their children. Families engage in the program for approximately six months.

The service uses the Parents Under Pressure Program. This multifaceted program intervenes on numerous levels including lapse and relapses, emotional regulation, parenting skills and budgeting. Research into the effectiveness of this model has shown significant improvements for families in three domains:

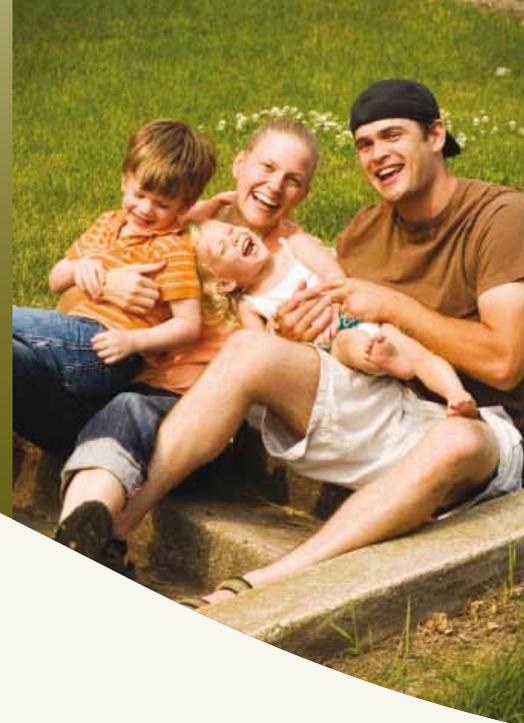
- Parental Functioning;
- Parent-child relationships;
- Parental substance abuse and risk taking behaviour<sup>11</sup>.

In many cases families continue to make progress after the intervention has finished. This highlights the power and effectiveness of this type of intervention.

UnitingCare West currently provides this service to about 30 families each year.

**PRAYER:** God of love, we pray: for all parents who are caught in the web of addiction; for their children potentially 'orphaned' by the dependency; and for those who feel bereaved as they watch their loved ones suffer. May your arms embrace them this day and always and may we be the bearers of hope. Amen.

Drug and alcohol use is a contributing factor in 57% of child protection orders<sup>10</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$50 will provide a family with some educational resources.
- \$500 will assist parents to access items or support, which will enhance their progress on this program.
- \$1750 supports one family to complete 25% of this program.
- Craft materials, colouring/activity books and games, which parents can use with children up to eight years old.

### Service

- Implement an educational campaign within your school community regarding drugs and alcohol.
- Conduct a project to create a library of games and resources for families to use with children up to eight years old.
- Conduct a senior student debate or forum about being a generation of responsible parents.
- Design, source and package “milestone reward packs” for families involved in this program.
- Create a DVD about this service for promotional use by UnitingCare West.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, film, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about this issue.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- When someone is relying on you it is important to keep yourself healthy and have a lifestyle that enables you to meet those responsibilities.
- Problematic substance use is likely to impact on your capacity to be the kind of parent you wish to be.
- Empowering someone to independently make and maintain healthy choices is a great contribution to our community.



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in this theme for your  
school program?  
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Industry Information, Speakers, Local Stories,  
Project Ideas & Details



Some  
adults cannot live  
independently in our  
community.

# HOUSING FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES OR MENTAL ILLNESS

## THE ISSUE

There are about 71,600 West Australians under the age of 65 who have a profound or severe disability<sup>12</sup>. A person with this level of disability will generally need help with basic activities like bathing, eating, dressing, continence, communication or mobility. These people are not likely to be able to live independently<sup>12</sup>.

Caring for children and adults with severe disabilities can sometimes be beyond the physical and emotional resources of a family. In some cases, parents may successfully care for adult children until they themselves become too frail to carry that responsibility. Naturally, they fear for their child's future. Young children with disabilities whose family are unable to care for them, may need to live in a residential care facility if an alternative foster family cannot be found.

Adults with a long term mental illness are more likely to be able to live independently, but during periods when their illness is active they need additional support. Sadly, this sometimes means that they cannot survive in the private rental market because there may be periods where they are unable to adequately look after the property or be reliable with rent. If they are evicted with a 'bad tenancy' record, securing another home may be very difficult.

## OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West provides a range of services to assist people with intellectual disabilities or mental illness who are facing these issues.

If the person is a child whose family is unable to adequately care for them, we will search for and support a very special foster carer/family who is willing to offer long term care. UnitingCare West is assisting around 20 children in this manner and we receive about one new request for this assistance each month.

If the person is an adult with an intellectual disability, they might live in one of our group homes. UnitingCare West is currently assisting over 20 people needing this type of support.

If the person is an adult with a mental illness, they might live in a home managed by UnitingCare West. We assist them more than a landlord usually would to enable them to meet their obligations as a tenant. UnitingCare West is assisting over 220 people needing this type of support.



**PRAYER:** God of compassion and justice, enable us to value more highly the comforts and care they need – the comforts and care we take for granted in our lives. As neighbours may we show hospitality and understanding as they develop the skills to live in the community with dignity and safety. Lord hear our prayer.  
Amen.

Caring for someone with special needs is sometimes beyond the capacity of that person's family.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- A specific piece of equipment, educational resource or recreational item for a young child with a complex disability – ask us about current needs.
- \$2 will provide an initial information pack to a family interested in fostering a child with a complex disability.
- \$100 will provide a networking morning tea for foster carers of children with complex disabilities.
- \$260 will give a foster family of a child with complex disabilities one month of the support they need to undertake this special role.
- \$1000 will give one adult with an intellectual disability one week of the 24-hour care they need to live in a community group home.
- \$48 will provide one adult with a mental illness the support they need to meet their responsibilities as a tenant for one week.

### Service

- Create a resource library for foster carers of children with disabilities at UnitingCare West.
- Plan and host a morning tea or lunch to thank foster carers of children with complex disabilities for their contribution to our community.
- Gardening and simple renovations at houses for adults with disabilities.
- Assist small groups of adults with intellectual disabilities to clean and maintain their shared car.

Some children with disabilities rely on foster families to care for them.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- There are many ways in which caring for a person with special needs might affect a family.
- Acquiring a disability or long term psychiatric condition can place a person's access to housing in jeopardy.
- People with disabilities should be assisted to live in and participate in our community as independently as possible.



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in this theme for your  
school program?  
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Industry Information, Speakers, Local Stories,  
Project Ideas & Details

8-11% of rural young people in Australia are same sex attracted<sup>13</sup>.

# DISCRIMINATION DUE TO SEXUAL DIVERSITY

## THE ISSUE

Homophobia is a fear of homosexuality but the term is often used to refer to a negative and contemptuous attitude towards same sex attracted individuals<sup>16</sup>. Unfortunately, our country communities are generally more homophobic than metropolitan ones<sup>17</sup>.

Homophobia in overt and subtle forms has resulted in reduced access to positive, accurate information about sexual health and relationships for same sex attracted young people living in country areas. The combination of high levels of homophobia and low levels of information mean that these young people are more likely to experience the following issues than their heterosexual counterparts:

- drug and alcohol abuse;
- family conflict and homelessness;
- assault;
- anxiety and depression;
- self harm and suicide;
- unplanned pregnancy;
- sexually transmitted infections; and
- early exit from education<sup>15</sup>.

The impact of homophobia can start affecting some young people from quite an early age. Research shows that a third of young people who are same sex attracted realise this before puberty and that they are aware from this early age of the social stigma attached to being same sex attracted<sup>14</sup>.

The families of these young people face their own stressors that are fuelled by the same homophobia and scarcity of information and support that impact on the wellbeing of their children.

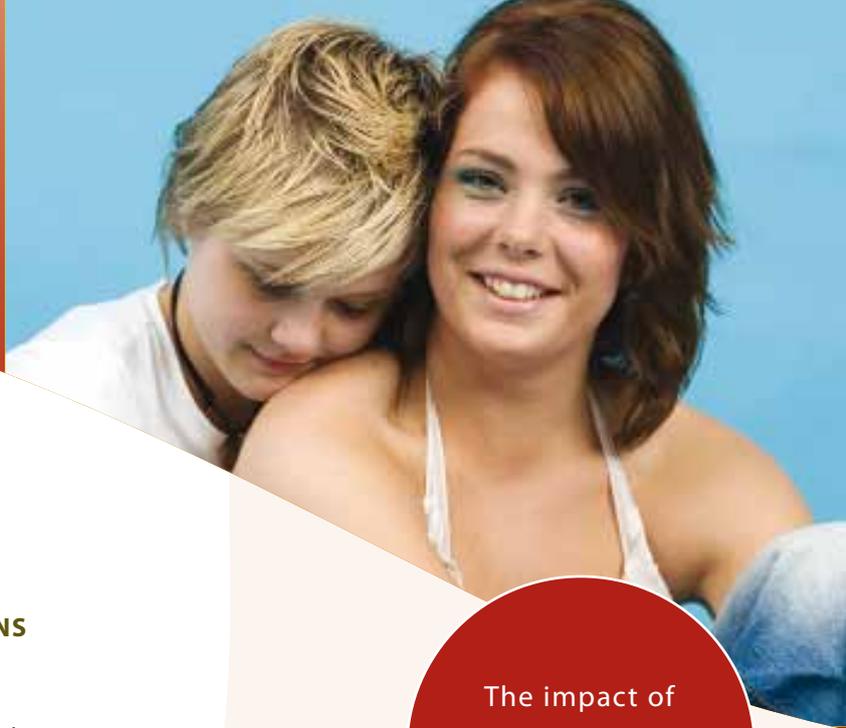
## OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West is helping our country communities become more inclusive and welcoming of same sex attracted young people by creating local support groups for them and their families, delivering community education, and empowering local people to build awareness and acceptance of sexual diversity within their community.



**PRAYER:** Creator God, we acknowledge the reality that millions of people each day are impacted by homophobia. May your Spirit flow over every barrier that separates us, dissolve all bitterness and infuse us with a newness of life. Hold us together with the acceptance of your unconditional love.  
Amen.

Homophobia is having an appalling effect on the health and wellbeing of same sex attracted youth living in country areas<sup>15</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$1 will give accurate and relevant information about sexuality and gender to a teenager questioning their sexuality.
- \$1 will give accurate and relevant information about sexuality and gender to the parents of a teenager who is questioning their sexuality.
- \$400 will distribute 1000 stickers sending positive messages about sexual diversity.
- \$500 will fund a banner with anti-discrimination messages for use at community events.
- \$2,500 will fund a community education activity in one regional community.
- \$4,000 will provide support to youth and families in a large regional community for one month.
- Magazines that are of interest to young people.

### Service

- Develop anti-homophobia banners/stickers/merchandise for use in community education events and activities.
- March in the Pride Parade with the team from UnitingCare West.
- Help design, create and operate a UnitingCare West Pride Fair Day stall.
- Run a project in collaboration with regional youth to transform a designated venue into an attractive and welcoming space for young people.

The impact of homophobia can start at an early age<sup>14</sup>.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- Fear can be fuelled by limited or inaccurate knowledge.
- Discrimination is often fuelled by fear.
- Bullying is a form of discrimination.
- Celebrate diversity and difference.
- It is important to have accurate facts about sexual health and sexuality.



**Interested  
in this theme for your  
school program?  
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Industry Information, Speakers, Local Stories,  
Project Ideas & Details

Family violence occurs in indigenous communities at a rate that is much higher than amongst non indigenous communities<sup>19</sup>.

# INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

## THE ISSUE

The health and wellbeing of indigenous Australians generally falls short of that enjoyed by non-indigenous Australians<sup>20</sup>. The issues faced by indigenous families are often complex and interrelated. For example, a domestic violence problem might coexist with housing, health, substance use and job skill issues.

The needs of two particular indigenous communities in the Armadale and the Fremantle-Melville-Cockburn regions have become the focus of UnitingCare West's attention.

Armadale has a higher number of Aboriginal residents in comparison with the Perth average and has seen a 94% Aboriginal population growth rate over the last ten years<sup>21</sup>. Armadale has been identified as one of the six most disadvantaged communities for children in Western Australia<sup>22</sup>. As a result, agencies have been encouraged to work together to implement early intervention strategies in this community to get better developmental and protection outcomes for its children.

An inquiry into family violence and child abuse in indigenous communities in Western Australia found that indigenous women account for three percent of the population but 50 percent of the domestic violence incidents reported to police and that indigenous children were the subject of sustained abuse at more than seven times the rate of non indigenous children<sup>19</sup>. The inquiry also identified that local indigenous communities need to be involved in building solutions to these issues.

UnitingCare West has been asked to investigate ways to better address family violence in the Fremantle, Melville and Cockburn regions.

## OUR RESPONSE

UnitingCare West provides assistance to the indigenous communities in both of these geographical areas to enable them to take control of the issues they face and to utilise available support.

As a result:

- An indigenous antenatal clinic day has been established in partnership with the Armadale Health Service. This has assisted indigenous women to access medical advice early in their pregnancy.
- Indigenous women with young children are accessing parenting information and health checks for their children at a regular social gathering in the Armadale area.
- The indigenous communities in Fremantle, Melville and Cockburn are obtaining a clearer understanding of the factors influencing family violence in their community and ways to address this issue.



Research shows that children living in the Armadale area are some of the most developmentally vulnerable in Western Australia<sup>18</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- Educational toys for children up to the age of five.
- \$100 will assist in providing counselling for people experiencing family violence.
- \$200 will deliver a presentation on the importance of the first 12 weeks of pregnancy to a group of indigenous high school students in the Armadale area.
- \$400 will assist a family with specific items to better meet the developmental needs of their children.
- Craft materials for use at the Indigenous women's social gathering in Armadale.
- Baking for morning tea at the indigenous women's social gathering in Armadale.

### Service

- Assist us to design and supply Emergency Safety Packs for individuals experiencing family violence.
- Create a DVD about this topic for use by UnitingCare West.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about one or more aspects of this issue.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- Communities need to be involved in creating solutions to problems they face.
- The importance of respecting cultural diversity.
- An understanding of the privileges inherent in being part of the dominant culture in a society.
- An understanding of the discrepancy between the standard of health experienced by the indigenous and non-indigenous populations in Australia.



**Interested  
in this theme for your  
school program?  
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Industry Information, Speakers, Local Stories,  
Project Ideas & Details

We need a range of services to support the specific needs of different groups of homeless people.

# HOMELESSNESS

## THE ISSUE

The incidence of homelessness in Western Australia is one of the highest in the nation<sup>23</sup>. Changes in recent years to our cost of living, housing availability and economy is making homelessness a reality for individuals and families who never dreamt they would end up in that situation.

The stereotype of a homeless person is an older man sleeping rough on the streets. While people who match this traditional view do exist, the reality is that almost 60% of homeless people are under 35 years and about one in every three homeless people is a teenager or child<sup>23</sup>. Homeless people and families are found, sleeping rough on the streets, in tents, in cars, moving between the lounge rooms of relatives and friends or in temporary accommodation and boarding houses.

Homelessness has many different causes such as a marriage breakdown, mental illness, unemployment or job loss, addiction to drugs or alcohol, domestic violence, family conflict, a bad tenancy record, death of a loved one and a lack of affordable housing. Just one unfortunate event can trigger a chain of circumstances that leads a person or family to homelessness.

Getting a job, going to work or school, personal hygiene, preparing meals, laundering, and staying healthy and positive can become enormously difficult for a person or family that has become homeless.

## OUR RESPONSE

Because of the diversity within homelessness one type of assistance is not going to work for everyone. UnitingCare West therefore offers different types of assistance depending on the specific needs of the homeless person or family.

If you are sleeping in a park or around the city, you can come into our drop-in centre during the day to have a shower, get something to eat, get out of the heat or cold, see the street doctor and get linked into other services.

If you are a woman escaping domestic violence you might stay at our refuge.

If you are a person or family who has difficulty being a reliable tenant you might move into a property that we manage and receive support to meet your tenancy obligations.

If you are a person or family who will potentially be a reliable tenant we will assist you to search for housing and help you to access funding assistance.

If you have a complex array of issues (eg unemployment, drug addiction, poor budgeting skills, unable to prepare a meal or clean and maintain a property), you might live in one of our transitional homes while you actively address each issue and become capable of securing and maintaining a private tenancy.

**PRAYER:** Lord Jesus, friend of the widow and orphan, you knew the journey in homelessness. We pray for those who do not believe that anyone really cares for them. Who feel that life is without hope. They are alone, vulnerable and homeless. Help us to reach out in love and service: for a community is judged by its treatment of those who are marginalised.  
Amen.

Each night about 13,000 people are homeless in Western Australia <sup>23</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$2 will provide one person with a meal and shower at the drop-in centre.
- \$150 will give one woman accommodation for one week in a domestic violence refuge
- \$200 will support a family to pay their rent on time or care for the house they live in well enough to avoid eviction.
- \$300 will provide emergency rent, house cleaning or gardening to stop a family being evicted from their home.
- \$800 will provide one month of the support needed to help one man transition from living on the streets into private rental accommodation.
- \$2000 will assist one family to find secure rental accommodation.
- Beanies, scarves, winter socks, hats, thongs, sunscreen, toothbrushes and toothpaste for adults and children.
- Non-perishable snack food or fresh baking.
- Art and craft materials for the women's refuge.

### Service

- Design, source items for and pack, linen and kitchen kits for men and women moving from the streets into their own home.
- Design, source items for and package home cleaning and garden care kits.

You are homeless if your housing is insecure.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- The traditional stereotype of a homeless person is an older man sleeping on the streets. The truth is that many younger people, families and children are also experiencing homelessness.
- Homelessness has many different causes and needs a variety of responses.
- An understanding of the difficulties faced by a homeless person or family.



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People  
with mental  
illness are among  
the most vulnerable  
and disadvantaged in  
our community <sup>26</sup>.

# SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

## THE ISSUE

A mental illness is a health problem which significantly affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves and interacts with other people<sup>25</sup>. Because of this, it can impact on the person's relationship with their family and friends and make it difficult for them to undertake roles normally expected of them by our community.

The fact that people experiencing a mental illness need access to health services is widely understood. The community issues facing people with mental illness are less commonly known. In 1993, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission concluded that people with mental illness are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community<sup>26</sup>.

People with mental illness repeatedly tell us that the biggest challenges they face are the stigma associated with mental illness, making and maintaining friendships and having a meaningful activity to undertake during the day.

Employment for example is known to provide people with confidence, a sense of contributing to the community in a valuable way, and access to a social group<sup>27</sup>. Unfortunately about three in every four people with mental illness do not hold a job<sup>27</sup>.

## OUR RESPONSE

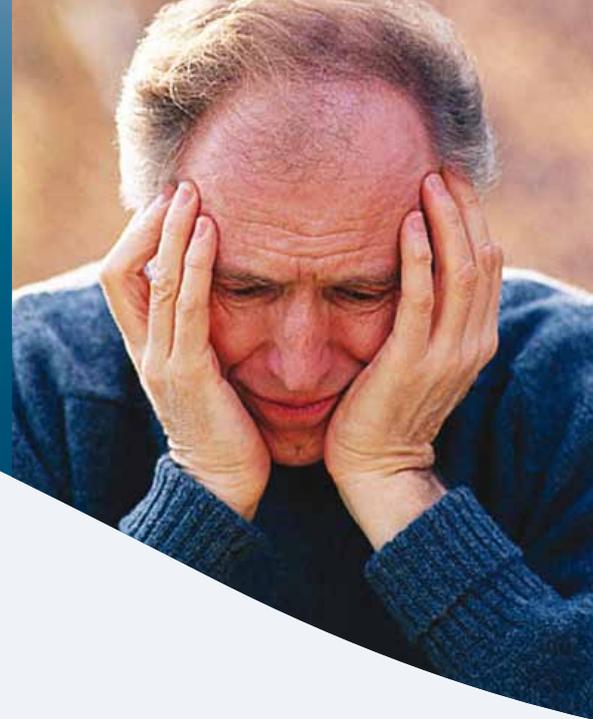
UnitingCare West coordinates social events, ecumenical worship services and a befriender service which assists over 300 local West Australians experiencing mental illness. These services are established in seven local communities and rely extensively on volunteers. These services are particularly unique because they recognise the importance of people's spirituality and they create opportunities for people to nurture their spirituality as part of a holistic response to mental illness.

UnitingCare West receives requests to continue to extend these services into other metropolitan and regional communities.



**PRAYER:** Her anger flares up and she doesn't know why ... she can't control it ...  
He doesn't make friends easily ... but he needs friends ...  
Lord for whom there was no room, help us to love one another and make room.  
Amen.

One in five Australians will experience mental illness during their lifetime <sup>24</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$42 per month will enable one person with a mental illness to benefit from the befriender service, access fortnightly social events, receive spiritual support and attend ecumenical worship services tailored to their needs.

### Service

- Assist with catering, food service and clean up at one of the regular social luncheons for people experiencing mental illness.
- Design and conduct a recruitment drive to attract new volunteers to become involved in the service.
- Develop and perform an artistic or literary event at a community luncheon for people experiencing mental illness.
- Assist in planning and conducting an ecumenical worship service which caters for people with mental illness.
- Work with UnitingCare West to establish a youth orientated component of this service.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, film, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about this issue.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- An understanding as to why people with mental illness struggle to maintain social networks and friendships.
- Mental illness is very common.
- There are many stereotypes and myths about mental illness.
- The importance of protecting your own mental health.



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A father's connection with their child whilst in prison can reduce the possibility of that child developing criminal behaviour<sup>28</sup>.

# COMMUNITY SAFETY AND CRIME

## THE ISSUE

Evidence shows that children of incarcerated fathers are more likely to get involved in crime themselves and end up in prison<sup>29</sup>. It also tells us that some people who have been incarcerated will resume their criminal activity after release and be reconvicted<sup>30</sup>.

For the children, the cause of this intergenerational cycle of crime is linked to the loss they experience when their dad is incarcerated and to how they are parented<sup>29</sup>. It is well documented that parenting skills are passed from generation to generation and that poor parenting skills are a predictive factor for incarceration<sup>31</sup>.

Interestingly, for the fathers, research shows that the quality of their relationship with their children while in prison and how successfully their family is reunified on release will impact on the likelihood that they will reoffend<sup>28</sup>.

Regardless of their parenting status, any prisoner with a long term sentence is likely to experience the effects of prison institutionalisation and the loss of their community support networks. This can make their transition back into the community difficult and increase the likelihood of recidivism.

## OUR RESPONSE

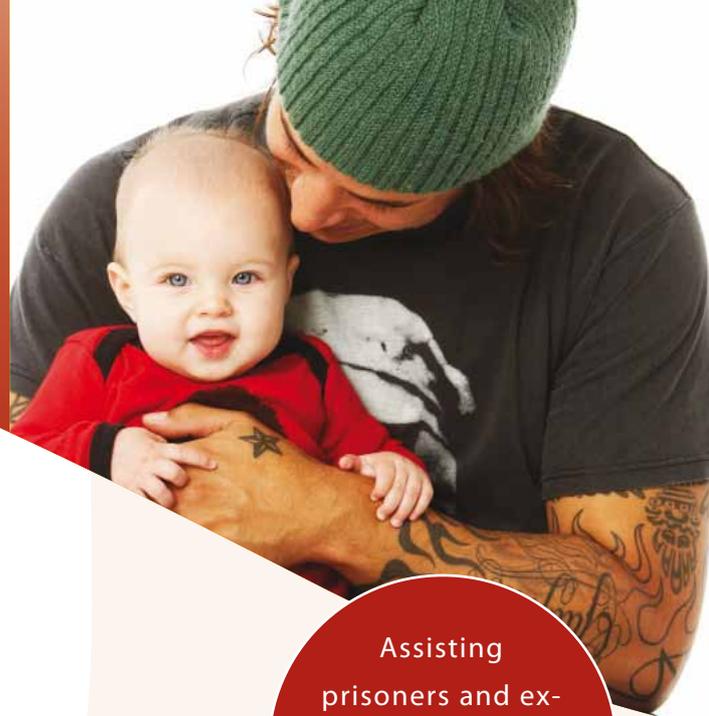
UnitingCare West provides a service which for over 20 years has been assisting prisoners who have served long term sentences to successfully transition back into our community. Ex-offenders who have had the benefit of this service are less likely to reoffend.

More recently, UnitingCare West has established a specialist service for prisoners who are fathers of young children. This service assists the fathers to develop a new set of parenting skills. It also improves the flexibility and quality of interactions between children and their detained fathers. On release, fathers are supported to continue to maintain appropriate contact and connection with their children.

Some of the activities undertaken to improve the quality of connection between fathers and their children may include recordings of dad reading bedtime stories, writing alternative sections of a story, special prison visiting days for children and providing gifts for the dads to wrap and give to their children at Christmas time.

By working with prisoners and ex-offenders UnitingCare West is contributing to making our community a safer place to live.

Australian research has found that connection to family can reduce recidivism rates<sup>28</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$30 will purchase one item for a children's game/toy library at Acacia prison.
- \$200 will provide one long term prisoner the basic household provisions needed on release from prison.
- \$4,000 will enable 80 children (\$50 per child) to spend a day at prison with their dad.
- Gifts and food for Christmas hampers.
- Children's letter stationery for use by incarcerated dads when writing to their children.

### Service

- Design, source and package basic pantry item kits for prisoners being released into the community.
- Set up a drive at your school or with local businesses to collect Christmas toys or food hamper items.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, film, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about this issue.

Assisting prisoners and ex-offenders helps to make our community safer.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- By working on relationships between a prisoner and their family, community safety can be improved.
- An inter generational cycle of crime exists even though most incarcerated parents do not want their children to follow in their footsteps.
- An understanding of prison institutionalisation and the types of difficulties an ex-offender may face when transitioning back into our community.



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Many children requiring foster care have complex difficulties and challenging behaviours.

# SAFE AND NURTURING FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN

## THE ISSUE

All children have the right to be safe and most parents want to care well for their children. Being a parent is a big responsibility, and for many different reasons there are times when some parents are not able to meet their child's most basic nurturing and safety needs. This can result in children being placed with a foster family. In some cases these parents and children long to be back together.

Unfortunately, the number of West Australian children requiring foster care following experiences with severe, abuse-related trauma has significantly increased over recent years.

These children often present with complex profiles that include:

- pre birth trauma such as foetal alcohol syndrome and drug withdrawal;
- childhood mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorder;
- severe behavioural and emotional issues such as problem sexual behaviour, impulsivity, physical and verbal aggression, fire lighting, self-harming and theft;
- chronic educational difficulties; and
- physical health problems.

These children with complex profiles sometimes also experience multiple foster family placement breakdowns due to the inability of existing systems or general foster carers to effectively respond to their complex matrix of needs and challenging behaviours.

## OUR RESPONSE

Firstly, UnitingCare West provides a highly specialised and respected service which helps reunite some families where children have been removed due to unsafe parenting practices. The parents must demonstrate that they have made sustainable changes to ensure that the home the children return to will be safe and nurturing. Not every family who embarks on this journey will be successful, but the benefits for those who are, are enormous.

In 2007, 60 children returned to live with their parents and a further 67 avoided the trauma of being placed into foster care because of the assistance they received from UnitingCare West.

Secondly, to build on the supports needed for children in foster care with complex needs, UnitingCare West is working towards implementing new and innovative approaches to the care and treatment of traumatised children in Western Australia who are subject to statutory child protection.

**REFLECTION:** Creator God, you made us family, and we need one another. May we honour that gift in our thoughts and deeds. May we appreciate the experience of love and forgiveness. May we own our feelings with integrity and take responsibility for our actions. As sacred worthy beings, here to heal and grow, bless us in any separation and may we know that through your grace we are always loved.  
Amen.

The number of children in Western Australia requiring foster care rose over 70% between 1998 and 2006<sup>32</sup>.



## STUDENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTIONS

### Donations

- \$10 will assist a family to go on an outing together or assist them with their transport needs.
- \$50 will assist to provide toys and books to be used to help strengthen the relationship between children and their parents upon reunification of the family.
- \$100 will assist parents to prepare a bedroom for one child who is returning home from foster care.
- \$1000 will provide 20% of the support required to enable a child who has been placed in foster care to be reunited with his/her parents.
- New linen and bath towels to make the transition smoother for children returning from foster care to their family as there is often a difference in the quality of these items between the two homes.

### Service

- Create a DVD about this topic for use by UnitingCare West.
- Organise a performance, exhibition, communication or event, which raises awareness in your school or wider community about one or more aspects of this issue.

Some children placed in foster care can be reunited with their family.

## SERVICE LEARNING MESSAGES FOR STUDENTS

- Some local children rely on our community to help make them safe.
- Foster families play an important role in our community.
- Sometimes children and parents who have been separated can be reunited.
- Sometimes it is people who are difficult to get along with who need the support and compassion of our community the most.



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# ABOUT UNITINGCARE WEST

## WHO ARE WE

UnitingCare West is a not-for-profit, community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Western Australia that touches the lives of thousands of families and individuals each year.

Our organisation is founded on Christian principles and values and on the particular Christian ethos of the Uniting Church in Australia. Our far reaching vision is "Justice, hope and opportunity for all", with our mission being "To support, serve and empower people most in need".

UnitingCare West is part of the UnitingCare national network of more than 400 Uniting Church organisations providing community services to millions of Australians each year.

UnitingCare West, through our innovative and creative programs and services, seeks to work in partnership with and meet the needs of those most disadvantaged and marginalized in our community.

Our organisation receives some government funding, however donations are crucial to the effective ongoing work of UnitingCare West's programs and services.

## WHAT WE DO

In a society where the gap between the rich and the poor widens and sectors of the community are disempowered and discriminated against, UnitingCare West stands alongside people, seeking to restore and empower them.

We deliver programs and services, focusing on those people most in need in areas such as Independent Living and Accommodation, Mental Health and Disability, and Community and Family Support. Our aim is to locate our services where people most in need can easily access them.

The issues we are responding to in the community and ways we are doing this are outlined in this booklet.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO CONTACT US:

[www.unitingcarewest.org.au](http://www.unitingcarewest.org.au)

[schools@unitingcarewest.org.au](mailto:schools@unitingcarewest.org.au)

Ph: 1300 663 298

Fx: 1300 663 528

GPO Box B74

Perth WA 6838



## OTHER UNITING CHURCH GROUPS UNDERTAKING COMMUNITY SERVICE WORK IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA



**Uniting Church Homes**  
www.uchwa.com  
(08) 9240 0313



**Good Samaritan Industries**  
www.goodsamaritan.com.au  
(08) 9463 0500



**UnitingCare Crossroads WA**  
www.crossroadswa.org.au  
(08) 9380 9427



**Frontier Services**  
www.frontierservices.org.au  
(08) 9274 7544



**Social Justice Board,  
Uniting Church WA Synod**  
www.wa.uca.org.au/social-justice  
(08) 9260 9800

The West Australian contact for information about the international initiatives of the Uniting Church (including the People in Mission program, partner churches and community development programs) is



**Uniting International Mission Committee, Uniting Church WA Synod**  
www.wa.uca.org.au/international  
(08) 9260 9800

*There are some community services initiatives operated locally by individual Uniting Church congregations*

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