

Connections

Stories of how your gift changes lives | Christmas 2021



The Christmas Elf: Gary Holland of Singleton

Fifteen years ago, at the first Christmas Lunch in Singleton hosted by Singleton Anglican Parish, Gary wanted to know how he could help on Christmas Day. The reply was, 'you can be the Christmas Elf'. Gary says this was intended as a joke but like most things, Gary tackled the request head-on, found an outfit, and has volunteered to greet people at Samaritans Christmas Lunch in Singleton ever since.

For Gary, the lunch is an extremely important event for the community where people can come together to connect, no matter where they come from.

"The community knows they can come to the lunch to be with other people on Christmas day and there is food, drinks and gifts," Gary said.

"What I like to say to everyone is, 'it doesn't matter if you have been naughty or nice – we would like to see you on Christmas Day at Samaritans Christmas Lunch in Singleton.'"

In the lead up to Christmas, you will find Gary walking up and down the main street in Singleton, donning his elf attire, to spread the word about the event.

"I like to reach more people – especially those that have difficulty with Christmas. They grin and bear it. The lunch is an opportunity to know there is support on Christmas Day," he said.

"It is truly community an event and I am proud to be part of it."

To find out more about Samaritans Christmas Lunches, head to www.samaritans.org.au.

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Everyone has been impacted by the events of 2021 in one way or another, but for many vulnerable people this year has been particularly tough. Because of you, we are able to provide spaces for vulnerable people to feel valued, listened to and respected. We caught up with Samaritans Information and Neighbourhood Centre (SINC) ER Intensive Case Worker, Peter about how this year has impacted our community and how Samaritans can help in the lead up to Christmas.



How has the recent lockdown impacted the people we support?

Now that the COVID supplement payments have stopped, we're seeing new clients that haven't had to come to us before. Most families need assistance with paying for their electricity and gas bills and we also offer vouchers for that little helping hand, and assistance for Christmas to help them get that fresh start for the new year.

We had a family of five come in – the mum was a stay-at-home parent who looked after the kids and the dad was working full time. COVID hit and the dad lost his job. They were living week-to-week before dad lost his job, and they were pushed over the edge where they needed that assistance for the first time. We helped them with electricity, gas and fresh fruit and vegetables. That was the beginning of the lockdown, and we gave them all the help we could to get them through.

What do you think Christmas will look like this year for the people we support?

Christmas will be different this year. With the kids being at home for such a long time, it has increased the bills and put a strain on budgets, so families won't have that extra money they would usually have to celebrate.

We're looking at having to provide more Christmas assistance for toys, food parcels and vouchers. We usually get Christmas food donated with our toy donations and we make up parcels. I did my first Christmas pick-up from the Kurri Kurri craft ladies. They all put in to buy toys and Christmas food and they make gifts throughout the year.

What does SINC do to support people in the community during Christmas?

We still have our normal Emergency Relief work and I also try to help my volunteers who are madly sorting gifts for local families in the community.

I send a call-out for assistance to the community for toys and food donations. We have a couple of local businesses who help us too. Once the gifts start rolling in, our volunteers sort them into age groups for the children – we do an interview with the parents who need assistance to get to know what the children like and what their needs are.

On the collection day we give the children's toys to the parents, and we have presents ready for adults as well.

It's a great feeling. All my kids are grown up so it's nice to see parents with little ones get gifts. Parents even come back and tell us how much their children loved their gifts.

Last year, we managed to get a new bike for a young girl who had to spend time in hospital in the lead up to Christmas. That was a great outcome.

It's amazing to see how the community steps up and helps each other – that's what Christmas is all about.

SINC is a vital community centre located in Cessnock that offers information, support and emergency assistance.



A Christmas Message from Bishop Peter: Enacting God's Engagement with the World

The Christian worldview is that there is a God who is deeply connected to the world. God loves us and wishes his creation (humanity and all things) to flourish - to experience abundant life.

Christians believe that we can call out to God, in prayer, and seek his engagement in the world and our life. They also hold to the idea that God will motivate people to promote his way of justice, mercy, and peace. They are called to change communities by encouraging women, men, and children to be people of purpose, love, and reconciliation. They point us all to a bigger story; inviting us to imagine that in the midst of the vast cosmos we have dignity and worth.

Over the next few weeks, as congregations begin to open up further, our faithful clergy and church members will prepare to tell again the Christmas story. Christians hold as profound truth that God took human form in Jesus of Nazareth. He acted this way to liberate us with hope both now and in eternity. God invites us to embrace a life of hope.

Samaritans was founded out of this Christian story. Bearing justice, mercy, and peace is at the heart of our work. We rejoice in the strong partnerships we have within the Church and with people of goodwill across our community. I encourage you to find ways of joining in this world-changing work through the Samaritans appeal and in works of goodwill wherever you may be.

May we all find ways of being bearers of love and hope this Christmas.

Caring for carers: Meet our ARAFMI Counselling Coordinator, Coralie



During National Carers Week (October 10 - 16), we caught up with our ARAFMI Hunter Counselling Coordinator, Coralie, about her role in supporting mental health carers.

National Carers Week is a time to recognise and celebrate the 2.65 million Australians who provide care and support to a family member or friend.

How would you describe your role?

My role is Counselling Coordinator for Samaritans Mental Health Carers ARAFMI Hunter. I have been working for ARAFMI for many years and have seen many changes within the organisation. One thing that has never changed is my passion for supporting anyone who has a loved one with mental illness.

Having several family members with mental illness, I have grown up having a good understanding of the impact mental health has on family and friends. How isolating this can be, how stigma around mental health can change people's lives, and the ripple effect this has in the wider community. This led me to the career of being a professional counsellor and working in this sector.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Working with my clients (carers) and seeing the difference it makes in their lives. Helping carers to manage their own lives in a healthier way whilst being there to love and support their loved

ones. Encouraging carers to be part of a team and recognising they don't have to do it on their own, that it's ok to ask for help.

What are you most passionate about?

Being there to listen and give empathy to carers so they feel heard, understood and have a voice. To educate and provide carers with skills to self-care, to set boundaries, and communicate in healthier ways. Along with many other things that can help carers have less stress and more positivity in their life.

What does the National Carer's Week theme 'Millions of Reasons to Care' mean to you?

There are many different types of Carers. At ARAFMI we define a carer as someone who has a loved one, friend or family, who has mental illness. They don't necessarily have to be living with that person or physically caring for them, although sometimes they do both.

I believe it is important to acknowledge our carers and let them know we value all they do. The theme 'Millions of Reasons to Care' means we should acknowledge and validate carers for all the work they do. For many it's a lifetime role that they do selflessly. 'Where would we be without carers?' is a question I think we should all give some thought to.

ARAFMI Hunter Mental Health Carers offer support and counselling for the families and friends of people with mental illness.





Christmas at Samaritans

This year, we're hoping to make Christmas feel that little bit more special. Samaritans is honoured to be able to continue our Christmas assistance to locals in need at the end of what has been another year of challenging times.

Samaritans Christmas Toy Warehouse, Christmas Day picnic lunches and extra Christmas assistance is all possible thanks to the generous communities we work within.

Thank you to the generous donors, sponsors and volunteers for helping us to continue to spread joy and hope to hundreds of families this Christmas.

Samaritans Christmas Lunch events are proudly sponsored by:



Already donated? Thank you!

If you haven't yet donated to the Samaritans Christmas Appeal, it's not too late.



Three ways to donate

1

Mail this form back to us

2

samaritans.org.au/donate

3

1300 656 336

I would like to donate

- ☐ \$50
- ☐ \$100
- ☐ \$150
- ☐ My choice of \$

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible, your receipt will be mailed to you.

My details

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Email:

My payment details

- ☐ Paying by credit card - or -
- ☐ Paying by cheque/money order (payable to Samaritans Foundation)

Card type: ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

Name on card:

Card number:

Card expiry: / (MM/YY)

I/we hereby authorise Samaritans to debit the selected credit card with the amount specified.

Your signature:

Extra ways to help

- ☐ I would like to become a monthly supporter and give to people in need regularly throughout the year. Please charge the listed credit card \$ each month.

I would like information on:

- ☐ Leaving a gift in my will
- ☐ Volunteering
- ☐ Donating food and goods



Mail this form to

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Warabrook
NSW 2304

SAMARITANS FOUNDATION ABN 38 574 464 524

Samaritans is one of the largest regional welfare organisations in Australia but is truly local to your region. As the welfare arm of the Anglican Church, we deliver over 100 programs and community services to thousands of individuals and families each year.

Samaritans would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia.