



# Strength in every story.

This season, we're sharing the stories that rarely make headlines but show the power of community care.

Autumn 2026  
Supporter Newsletter

**Uniting**

# Paving the way forward.



I've had the privilege over these past months to listen, learn, and begin building relationships with the people who make Uniting Vic.Tas such a remarkable part of the community.

**What has struck me most is how central these relationships are to our work. The trust we build with the people we serve, the commitment of our staff and volunteers, and the generosity of you, our compassionate supporters.**

Through my previous roles in community services and local government, I've been driven by a belief that lasting change happens when people come together with shared purpose.

At Uniting, compassion isn't just a value, it's a practice, lived every day in the way we partner with individuals and families experiencing hardship.

Whether it's housing support, mental health care or family violence support, I see again and again how trust, respect, and genuine collaboration shape better outcomes for people.

So far during my time with Uniting, I've valued connecting with our communities, visiting programs, and hearing directly from you about what matters most. I look forward to continuing this work.

Your generosity is not simply financial support, it's a partnership. It strengthens our ability to respond, to innovate, and to remain present for people when they need us most.

Thank you for the confidence you place in us and for walking alongside Uniting in this work.

There is much ahead to learn and much to achieve together. I'm excited for the path before us.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'C. Jeffs'.

Carol Jeffs  
**Chief Executive Officer**



## Content warning

This article contains themes of drug use and domestic violence. If it raises concerns for you, please contact Lifeline **13 11 14** or **1800RESPECT**.

# Hope, humanity and harm reduction.

Overdose doesn't discriminate,  
and neither does Nathan Farley.



### **On the frontline of Uniting's Harm Reduction and Overdose Prevention team, he supports people living with alcohol and other drug (AOD) dependency.**

Many of Nathan's clients experience compounding challenges, such as housing instability, healthcare needs, and financial difficulties. Some don't have a fixed address or identification, so they miss out on essential services.

Uniting's assertive outreach approach ensures these individuals are not forgotten and can access timely support, wherever they are and whatever their circumstances.

"Our clients are people who've fallen through the cracks ... people who get put into the too hard basket," Nathan explains.

Nathan works with clients to address the strong link between trauma and substance use, which affects more than 80% of the people he supports. He recognises that people turn to drugs for a variety of reasons, often to cope with past experiences or difficult circumstances.

Clients like Shelisha\*, a 21-year-old single mother, who was trapped in a complex cycle of drug dependency, domestic violence, and housing insecurity. Her vulnerability was exploited by an older family friend who used drugs as a means of control.

With support from Nathan and the Uniting team, Shelisha was able to break free from the abuse, move into safe housing, and begin addressing her drug use in a supported away.

Building trust is central to Nathan's work. "People have usually given up on services because of past experiences. Unless you build rapport with people, they're not going to be open about their circumstances," he says.

Despite everything they've experienced, Nathan's clients are remarkable. Their ability to cope, be generous with what little they have, and use humour to get through challenges continually inspires him.

*\*This is a true story about real people. Some details such as names have been changed to respect the wishes of the person featured.*



To learn more about our Alcohol and Other Drug services, scan the code or visit [unitingvictas.org.au/aod](https://unitingvictas.org.au/aod)



# Compassion on the front line.

Homelessness remains one of the most pressing social challenges in Victoria, with thousands of people without a safe and secure place to call home.

**For many, the barriers to accessing support are overwhelming. Complex service systems, mental health challenges, and the stigma of homelessness often prevent people from seeking the help they need. That's where Uniting's Street2Home program steps in.**

## What is Street2Home?

Street2Home is an assertive outreach program operated by Uniting in the Central Highlands and Wimmera regions.

Assertive outreach programs, like Street2Home, actively go out into the community, helping those who are sleeping rough, living in their cars or experiencing instability without a permanent home.

Every day, the teams travel across the region offering immediate support and assistance.

In the past financial year alone, the Central Highlands program supported 177 individuals, including children, young people, families, and older adults.

This is how just one day can look for the team:

- Travelled over 240km to support 28 people into regional housing
- Travelled over 190km to help rough sleepers
- Secured 2 long-term housing offers
- Supported 2 women experiencing family violence
- Prevented 1 rental scam
- Answered 30 client calls.

## The people behind the program.

**Meet Ada (pictured left). She is a fierce advocate and dedicated Assertive Outreach Worker in Uniting's Street2Home team in the Central Highlands.**

"People think homelessness is just someone sleeping rough," Ada explains.

"But it's so much more than that. It's people in cars, couch surfing, or in crisis accommodation. It's men, women, and children. Homelessness doesn't have a single look."

Many of the people Ada supports have never had a home before.

"Finding a home is just the first step. Long-term, wrap-around support is crucial to help people exit homelessness for good."

Building trust is at the heart of Ada's work.

"You're often the first person they've trusted in a long time. The first person they feel safe enough to share their story with."

That trust opens the door to practical help: food, toiletries, and pathways to supportive housing.

"Whether someone's been homeless for 6 months or 6 years, that has an impact on who you are."

Ada knows the challenges associated with homelessness are complex: mental health struggles, family violence, trauma, and social isolation. But giving up is never an option.

"If we give up, they'll give up. So, we don't. We explore every possible avenue."

Her message to the community is clear:

"Homelessness doesn't discriminate. People who are homeless are people too. They deserve and need your kindness."

Ada wants everyone to remember one thing:

"Nobody chooses to be homeless. It's the result of circumstances beyond their control. They didn't choose that."



To find out more about Homelessness Support, scan the code or visit [unitingvictas.org.au/homelessness](https://unitingvictas.org.au/homelessness)



## Building a new beginning.

**When Uniting's Street2Home team found Lisa\*, she was living in a tent in the bush with her 3 children, aged 10 months, 2 and 9.**

After fleeing a violent relationship, she had no safe place to go and was doing everything she could to protect her young kids.

When her children became sick, worry for their health grew and the fear of failing as a mother became overwhelming.

Street2Home stepped in, arranging crisis accommodation and later helping Lisa secure a private rental.

They didn't stop at housing, providing wrap around support such as help with groceries, paying bills and mental health care to ensure the family had everything they needed to stay safe.

For Lisa, even the simplest comforts felt like milestones: the relief of a hot shower after putting the kids to bed and the quiet of a cuppa on the couch.

These simple things meant Lisa could shift from surviving to rebuilding, creating a home for her family to thrive.

*\*Lisa's story is one of real hope. Some names and images used have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.*



# Resilience in the face of poverty.

Mum Adara knows all too well the stress and struggle of living in poverty.

**Adara and her son, 3, risked becoming homeless when the rent on their home suddenly increased beyond what she could afford.**

Growing up in the care system, Adara does not have the safety net of family to fall back on. Now, as a young single mum, she shoulders the full weight of trying to create safety and stability for herself and her little boy. All while living on the edge of poverty and homelessness.

“I got referred to Uniting during a bit of a rough patch,” says Adara.

To pay bills and care for her son, Adara has been forced to forgo vital medical support for her chronic health issues.

“Once the rent is paid, trying to cover the rest of the bills, groceries and other necessities, there’s nothing left,” she explains. “A lot of those necessities I have to miss out on so I can put them forward for my son.”

For Adara, the relentless stress of covering rent and household bills has become an unbearable weight.

“Rental prices are going up and the cost of living is still going up. It gets to the point where I worry, I just can’t do this anymore,” she says. “I’m burnt out ... I want to do more than just survive ... I want to live.”

Now, with Uniting’s support, Adara has finished her Certificate IV in Youth Work and is completing her Diploma, aiming to work in homelessness services.

“Without the support of Uniting I don’t think my son and I would currently have a home,” she says.

“I love to speak out about my story and the stories I’ve heard in the sector. I have a quirky brain, with ADHD, and it helps me see things differently.”

Adara’s strength and resilience shine through, fuelled by her determination to build a life where her son can thrive, and to use her experiences to support others facing homelessness.

# 100 years of op shops.

Australia recently celebrated 100 years of op shops, and Uniting have been there (almost) the whole way.



**Uniting's op shop roots run deep, our legacy churches and founding agencies were leaders in reusable and affordable retail, with many op shops operating since the 1930s.**

These shops weren't just about clothing and household goods. They were about independence and dignity, enabling people to choose and purchase what they needed, at a price they could afford.

Our teams of staff and volunteers continue to shape spaces where people find connection, express individuality and discover the joy of treasure hunting, all the while supporting vital community programs across Victoria and Tasmania.

Amber has volunteered every Sunday for the past two years at our op shop in Wendouree.

"It's just a really good way to spend your Sunday. You get to meet some really nice people, and it's always great when people come back. I've also managed to rope a few friends in," she laughs.

Amber adds that volunteering at Uniting has also opened her eyes to the services Uniting provides.

"Before I started volunteering, I didn't really know much about the organisation," she says.

"I knew it was a charity, but that was about it. I didn't know how the money the shop makes goes towards other services that help people in my community. Being a volunteer is just a really nice way to give back."



## Humans and hounds welcome.

**Dogs and their owners are always welcome at Uniting's Op Shops.**

Local pup Milo (pictured above) knows this as she heads straight to the counter at Uniting's Preston Op Shop to greet the staff.





# A life of giving and a will to support.

Ralph's connection to Uniting runs deep. He shares what inspired him to leave a legacy with a gift in his Will.

**“Uniting has always held a special place in my heart because of its inclusive and compassionate approach to community care.**

Over the years, my family and I have had contact with various Uniting services, family support, children's programs, housing assistance, and community carers. Each experience has deepened my respect for the organisation and the people behind it.

While there are many faith-based charities doing wonderful work, my longstanding connection with Uniting made it a natural choice when considering how I could give back. Including Uniting in my Will felt like an extension of the support and commitment I've had for many years.

My relationship with Uniting began through my membership in the Uniting Church, and I've followed its evolution closely, from its various agencies to the unified organisation it is today.

Now in my late 70s, I reflect on how fortunate my family has been. Retirement has given me the space to think about legacy and what I wish to leave behind.

My wife and I made our first Wills 50 years ago when we married, and we've updated them as life changed. Including Uniting in my Will is a way to ensure that my values live on, and that I continue to support love and justice in our community.

If you're considering leaving a gift to Uniting, I encourage you to start; even a small amount makes a difference.

Sharon at Uniting is incredibly supportive and can guide you through the process. It's a rewarding experience to know that, even after I've gone, I can help build a more compassionate and inclusive future.”

If you would like to know more about leaving your own legacy or like to receive a copy of our free Gift in Will guide, please contact:

**Sharon Wangman**  
**Program Lead, Gift in Wills**

**T** 0435 035 442

**E** [bequests@vt.uniting.org](mailto:bequests@vt.uniting.org)

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# More than a meal.

Anne\* arrived at Uniting's services during one of the hardest times in her life.



**Newly arrived in Australia, she found herself alone with a newborn baby. She had fled a violent relationship and was now trying to start again in an unfamiliar country.**

"I was fearing for my life," Anne reflects. "The abuse he was putting me through was too much."

Without family, friends, or a support network to lean on, she also carried the weight of postnatal depression.

"I was on my own," says Anne. "To deal with a newborn baby and being a first-time mum ... it was really, very stressful."

Struggling with the financial strain of raising her child alone, Anne found that her income support barely stretched to cover the bills.

Luckily, she found Uniting, and Food For Families offered her the practical support she needed to find her footing again.

"It covered my needs and my baby's needs ... milk, nappies, even little things like crackers that children love," says Anne.

Thanks to her local service's variety of foods, Anne could share her heritage with her now toddler, helping them stay connected to their culture in Australia.

"Even though we may not be back home, this food can give us a sense of home," she says.

Beyond putting food on the table, this support gave Anne the confidence to start moving forward.

"The biggest thing was getting myself back," she says. "Reminding myself that I am strong. I can do this. I am more than enough."

Anne shared her message of appreciation to those donating to Food For Families.

"Thank you for being supporters of this wonderful program. It makes a lot of difference ... helping us to live without worry," she says.

"It's a huge relief to someone with limited support and income ... getting to put even one meal on the table. It makes a big difference."

*Anne\* gratefully shared her story about her family. Some details like names and images have been changed to respect her wishes.*



To register for Food For Families, scan the code or visit [foodforfamilies.org.au/register](https://foodforfamilies.org.au/register)

# Providing safety and comfort.

Thank you so much to our amazing appeal donors at Christmas time.



## A season that, while joyful for many, is the most dangerous time of year for others.

Thanks to your compassion and generous contributions to Uniting's Christmas appeal, we were able to help mums like Priya\*.

"No words can quite describe life as a victim of domestic violence. The numerous attempts to free myself from the relentless abuse and the financial barriers make escaping so hard," shared Priya.

"With the help of Uniting, moving was made possible ... Something I am so grateful for. And then the further assistance gave me a new lease on life. One I never thought was possible.

"I was supported and listened to with empathy ... I was treated with softness and warmth. I never felt like a burden. My experiences were validated.

"I appreciate my [Uniting case worker] advocating for me and my children. Uniting has made a difference in my life, and I am forever indebted for it."

*\*This is a true story about real people. Some details like names and images have been changed to respect the wishes of the person involved.*

## Every can, can make a difference.

### For Anne\*, a single can of coconut cream gave her the strength to keep going.

Alone in an unfamiliar country with a newborn baby to care for, the single mother found solace in cooking a meal that reminded her of home, using groceries donated by Uniting's Food For Families program.

By donating groceries your family loves to cook with, you're not only helping someone overcome food insecurity but also providing them with the dignity of choice and hope for a better future. Thanks to your generosity we provided 61,026 meals last year.



To access our Food For Families shopping list, scan the code or visit [foodforfamilies.org.au/publications/shopping-list](https://foodforfamilies.org.au/publications/shopping-list)



# Join in on the fun of fundraising.

## Celebrate with impact.

If you're celebrating a birthday, wedding, anniversary, or other special event, how about asking your guests to donate to Uniting instead of buying a gift?

Simply register your celebration with us to create an online fundraising page, or request donation envelopes for an in-person event. Share them with family and friends to make your special occasion truly meaningful.



Scan to find out more or visit [fundraise.unitingvictas.org.au/celebration](https://fundraise.unitingvictas.org.au/celebration)

## Cycling for change.

Team Lifecycle are once again using their legs for good, raising vital funds for Uniting's mental health services.

The 9 dedicated cyclists will be riding 520km on the weekend of March 28 and 29.



Scan to donate to help them cross their fundraising finish line or visit, [fundraise.unitingvictas.org.au/event/m2m](https://fundraise.unitingvictas.org.au/event/m2m)

## Winter Blanket Appeal.

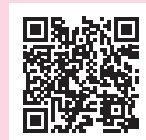
With winter around the corner, temperatures will soon begin to drop. Warm clothing and blankets are needed urgently to help people get through the cold.



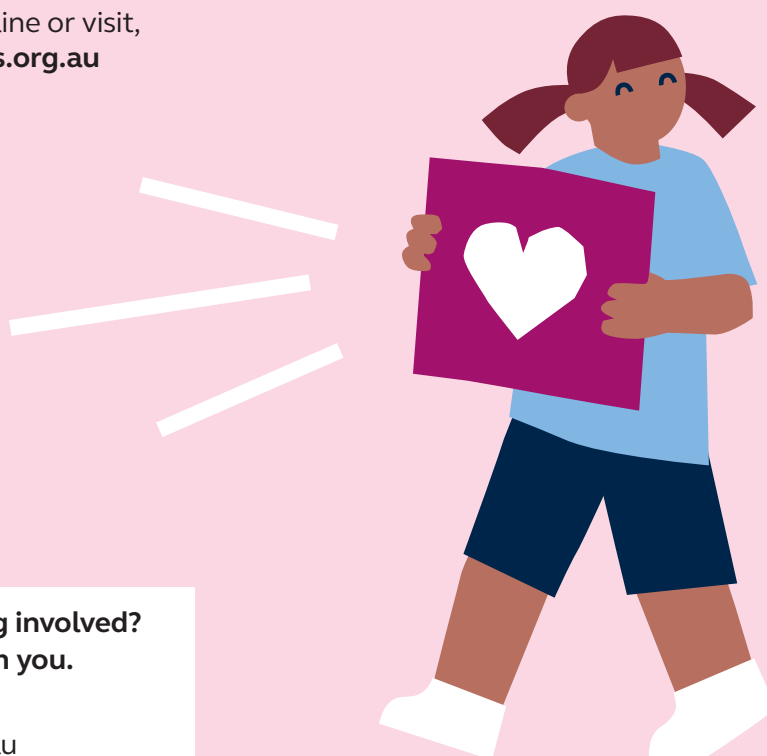
Scan to learn how you can help families survive the harsh weather, or visit [unitingvictas.org.au/local-winter](https://unitingvictas.org.au/local-winter)

## Entertainment membership.

Sign up for an Entertainment membership for exclusive discounts on dining, shopping, travel and more. Plus 20% of every membership supports Uniting.



Scan to buy or renew your membership, or visit [subscribe.entertainment.com.au/fundraiser/18438m3](https://subscribe.entertainment.com.au/fundraiser/18438m3)



Want to learn more about getting involved?  
Our team would love to hear from you.

T 1800 668 426

E [community@unitingvictas.org.au](mailto:community@unitingvictas.org.au)

# Your donations are building a brighter future.

Call us  
1800 668 426

Visit  
[unitingvictas.org.au  
/newsletter](https://unitingvictas.org.au/newsletter)



Our foundation flows from people of faith in the late 1800's, seeing a need and responding with generosity. Our heritage unites us in a common purpose and with common values, a collective spirit was born.

Today, we dare to reach further than ever before, informed by the voice of the people we serve and the communities with which we partner, to drive real, positive social change.



Uniting is the community services organisation of the Uniting Church in Victoria and Tasmania.

**Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited**  
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# Uniting