

Reach Out

ADVENT 2023

NOT ALL
Christmases
ARE EQUAL

Feature Story
Getting Mum back
is the best present

The sense of community
Choir fills hearts
and minds

From our supporters
A little joy goes
a long way



**Christchurch
City Mission**

Te Whare Mīhana Ki Ōtautahi



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City Mission

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Your gift to others through supporting us

All our services go into overdrive in December to help as many families as possible because we know so many will face the festive season with nothing and no joy.

Our foodbank will provide **1,800** special Christmas food parcels in the week before Christmas Day and this is a huge effort for us when we usually average about **350** parcels a week. We will create a basic food parcel and fresh produce, then add lots of special treats like chicken, ham, sausages, pavlovas, biscuits, chocolates, jelly, custard, gravy and so on to make the Christmas Day meal a true celebration. This will benefit at least **6,000** local people - many of them young children - and we are targeting this help towards

families who we know desperately need this Christmas lift.

We will make sure **750** children don't wake up to nothing on Christmas morning by providing presents to give them a day to remember.

For individuals and families suffering from mental health and addiction problems, our experts will have a huge month in December - because this can be the most challenging time of the year. Our figures from December last year give a good idea as to what we can expect - **31** people detoxed in our residential unit, another **35** were helped to manage a withdrawal at home, and another **398** people found support and advice in sessions with our expert counsellors.

Too many people are lonely in Christchurch and a Christmas alone is worst of all. We run men's and women's alcohol and other drug day programmes that offer support, company and Christmas celebrations, and combined in December we can expect at least **330** people to come to us. In December last year our social workers looked after **216** people.

On Christmas Day itself we will be directly looking after **50** people who will be living with us in our emergency shelters, transitional housing and in our residential detox facility. We will make sure they have a special Christmas dinner and feel they belong.



Reception area of Wahine Whai Ora women's alcohol and drug day programme sharing the Christmas spirit for clients.

Thank you

Reach Out magazine is for those who support the Christchurch City Mission and a small way we can share the work we do with your support.

Contact Us

276 Hereford Street, PO Box 1032,
Christchurch 8140

Phone (03) 365 0635

Email enquiries@citymission.org.nz

A wonderful time of friendship



Christmas has always been a special time in my family, centred around church activities and family celebrations. It has been a time when family across New Zealand has often come together. A couple of years ago we had a few week-old baby from Auckland and an over 100 year old godfather at our Christmas lunch. Such a wonderful time of friendship and cross generational activity.

I can recall as a child we used to bus into the city with big excitement to visit the Cathedral in the Square, with presents in hand to place under the tree, and to look with wonder at the Nativity Scene on display. It was a special time of choosing a present that we would like to receive ourselves, but that we would offer as a gift to those less fortunate than ourselves. I continued that routine with my children in their early years.

Christmas is a busy time of the year for families and parents, no matter their financial situation. There are great pressures, many activities, a big build up to one day, and there are often stresses that build up in that time of preparation, and stresses on the day itself.

These pressures can be even greater for those who have been struggling, trying to cope with the never-ending worry of funding food, paying expenses that get higher every year, and keeping the family together under very trying circumstances. Then Christmas comes

and these people who were already struggling are under even greater pressure to be the best parent they can be and to provide a memorable time for their children. Advertising shows everyone celebrating Christmas with gifts and fun activities which increases the pressure on those who are struggling. How can they do that for their children?

It is such a blessing for us at the City Mission to know that this is a time when our donors and the community really do support us with their gifts of money, food, toys, and their time. It is a challenging time for the Mission as we work to give the best support we can to those who have used our services during the year.

I thank every donor, supporter, volunteer, staff member and board member for being part of our commitment to give hope to the most vulnerable people in our city over the year. I seek your generous support as we move towards this Christmas, which will again be a huge challenge for us.

In Grace and Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Corinne Haines". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Corinne Haines
Christchurch City Missioner

Christchurch City Mission Services

Foodbank | Homelessness and Housing | Men's and Women's Emergency Shelters
Alcohol and Other Drug Addiction Services | Youth Mental Health and Addiction Services | Residential Detox
Learning and Development | Men's and Women's Day Programmes | City Mission Op Shops | Thrive Café
Community Support | Community Development | Back to School Programme | Financial Mentoring
Transitional Housing | Medical Unit | Social Worker Hub | Homeless Outreach



Getting Mum back is the best present

“This Christmas will be the best, the best” says Mandy and maybe because it’s too painful to say “ever” she leaves the word unsaid but hanging in the air.

She’s 51 and sits nervously, yet determinedly, in one of the many counselling rooms tucked away in the rabbit warren of the City Mission’s headquarters in Hereford Street.

This Christmas will be the first in decades she is sober. She is going to celebrate it with her daughters in Australia who she loves more than anything.

“I want them to see me sober, I want to be around them and just experience being with them,” she says. She has sent photos and one daughter said *‘oh you look so healthy and good and happier - you are smiling. This is the mum we’ve always wanted’*,” Mandy says proudly.

“They have always loved me but now they confide in me, they send me photos... because they are going to get a sensible answer. I’m like a mother should be with her kids” Mandy says.

Her drinking started young and continued through marriage and children but problems escalated with depression and anxiety and she found herself isolated, homeless, and spent time in our women’s emergency night shelter. All the time she was losing touch with family and friends, lost in her shrinking world of misery.

About three years ago she broke down realising she couldn’t live like this anymore. That was rock bottom and the start of her recovery.

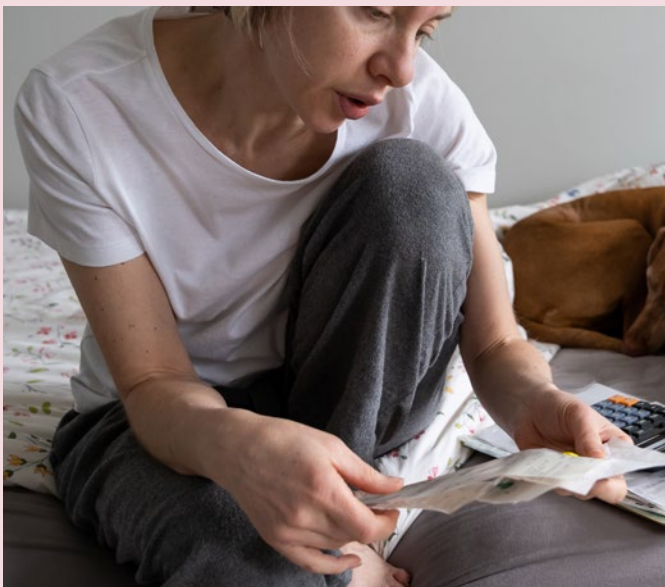
Here in our counselling room she is surrounded by City Mission staff that opened their hearts and doors to help her. A few metres away is Thorpe House where she stayed

to detox. Over the road is our foodbank where staff gave her emergency food and our new transitional housing building where she stayed for months supported by our staff while she re-learned how to live again with confidence. And today she is in the Wahine Whai Ora women’s recovery management day programme which wraps her in support from other women and our counsellors.

She has a new home, she is sober and she is happy.

“I sit in my house at night and pinch my leg, like how did I get here? After all that time, all those years and years of living the way I was and you know I love everybody at the Mission, I can’t speak highly enough, they have all contributed to me changing my life.”

This is a happy Christmas story but it has come after a long journey of recovery where the Mission,



*“I’m like a mother
should be with
her kids.”*



and the supporters who fund us, have walked alongside Mandy the whole way.

Sadly, there are thousands of other Canterbury people who will need our help if they are also going to find some relief and hopefully some joy this Christmas.

Christmas should be a celebration, but for many people it is the most stressful, lonely, unhappy time of the year because with life already very hard the extra demands and expectations push them into crisis.

Christchurch needs us all year round, but we are needed most of all at Christmas when we step up to help people to get through the Christmas season - especially families with children - children who don't understand why their home is so empty and life is so different to the others they see all around them in the media.

This beautiful handwritten letter of thanks from a young girl of 9 years, whose family got food from us, shows how much it means when the Mission (through our supporters' generosity) helps a family in need. She wrote:

"Dear City Mission, thank you for everything you've done for me and my family.

Thank you for helping out with other families and trying your best to help them.

I want to thank you personally too."

And how touching that she thanked us on behalf of other families too.

We will be making a huge effort over the week before Christmas, to give families who we know are in the greatest need of a special Christmas food parcel.

Our foodbank will provide 1,800 Christmas hampers and they are an

enhanced food parcel to see clients through three days with extra treats like chicken, ham, sausages, pavlovas, biscuits, Christmas chocolates, jelly, custard, gravy and then whatever fresh produce we have to make Christmas Day special.

This will help feed at least 6,000 people - many of them young children like the lovely writer of that letter.

All our other services - our addiction counsellors, emergency shelter staff, social workers, budget advisors, community development workers, day programme staff, social enterprise staff - will be working hard to give struggling people in Christchurch the best Christmas they can have as they face the season of the greatest stress. Those who are overwhelmed and only just surviving find Christmas a tough time of the year.

**Name and image changed to protect privacy*

Choir fills hearts and minds

The sound of voices singing *Mary, Did You Know?* fills our upstairs learning hub room and then ends. In the silence, everyone thinks ‘so how was that, are we on track?’

“Yes! Good, good,” says choir tutor Zara Ballara, but they already knew this was a good run through. That’s what the second year of being in the City Mission Choir brings.

The choir – a mix of City Mission clients including homeless people, staff and volunteers – will be back on December 13 to be involved once again at the City Mission Carol Service in the Transitional Cathedral.

Zara says last year was an experiment but it worked out so well and that first Carol Service was so magic there was no doubt it must continue.

Seeing such a mixed group come together as whanau to perform is very special but she says what’s happening inside for the singers is maybe even more important.

“What people don’t realise about singing is it takes a lot of confidence and belief ... it’s a physical engagement from deep within your core and I think that has healing properties for everyone.”

“You get these emotions out, you share your vulnerabilities, and you’re allowed to be vulnerable, and because we’re in a beautiful group that makes it okay.”

Zara says she can see the progress in their music and in themselves. Last year choir members were finding their voices, this year they talk about tonal colours and use more musical and choral language.

“You can see the progress in the way people make eye contact. When I started, the clients wouldn’t look at me. But now this is a family who look at and out for one another.”

Shannon, a former homeless man, has stayed with the choir, and says it has given him more confidence socially and has helped him speak up. He is very enthusiastic about being involved.

“The sense of community is so warming and people put their differences aside and celebrate unity. It has been uplifting for my wairua (spirit) and learning together really makes it work. Everyone has to open themselves up.”

The City Mission Carol Service will be in the Transitional Cathedral on Wednesday, 13 December.



“The sense of community is so warming and people put their differences aside...”



A little joy goes a long way

The look on the children's faces - wide-eyed with excitement and joy - will make the weeks of work getting our Christmas Grotto ready to sparkle worthwhile.

Once again Josie (pictured left) and Tina from our op shop team will transform themselves into very caring elves and our Hereford Street chapel will be filled with decorations, tinsels and boxes of beautiful presents.

For many years we have been making sure Christchurch children, who would likely wake up on Christmas morning to receive little or nothing, feel the seasonal joy like all the others.

Of course it is only possible thanks to donations from many,

many individuals, organisations, church groups, and schools who give us presents to distribute.

Josie and Tina reveal there's another look on faces in the chapel grotto which has a big impact on them.

It's the look they see on the parents' faces when they see their children so happy. The parents are often carrying a lot of sadness. They may have been through a hard year and just for a moment they feel relief that something has gone right for their kids.

Father Christmas will drop into our chapel the weekend before Christmas to greet children from the 250 families (around 500

children) who we will be targeting for help.

But we also support many more children across the community by distributing enough presents for another 250 children who are supported by other agencies, around the city including Otautahi Foster Care, St John of God Waipuna, Emerge, Department of Corrections, Canterbury Kids, Presbyterian Support, Family Trust and Family Health.

As you can see, we are the heart of Christchurch's effort to get presents to children and share the seasonal joy as widely as possible.

CareForce couple believe in our work

Alison and Hamish Wilson go above and beyond when it comes to supporting the City Mission.

Not only do this super couple make a regular donation via our CareForce Programme towards our work, they have also donated their winter energy payments and furniture to our op shops, plus they are key members of our foodbank volunteering team.

Pop into our new foodbank site on Fridays and you will spot them busily sorting food and making up food parcels with grace and a keen sense of humour.

The foodbank changed location this year so they are now part of the setup that includes our revolutionary new self-serve operation.

Because they work with us, they get to see close up the people we help and the ways we help them.

They are impressed that the men waiting for our day programmes will say hello to them when they arrive and later as they leave clients will sometimes thank them for coming and giving their time. It's a little thing but it means a lot to them.

"What we both feel is if we do a regular donation it gives the City Mission a steady help. Also, with volunteering, here we can see where our donations are going. It's an organisation that we firmly believe in," Alison says.

Hamish, a former Army officer, says he backs the Mission *"because, well, it's really a case of knowing where the money's going and believing in it."*

They loved last year's City Mission Christmas Carols Service and will be back again this year on 13 December.



Alison and Hamish Wilson

From our supporters

Many of our donors believe if they are comfortable financially, then it's right to help others who are struggling.

"I have been blessed with enough to live comfortably into my dotage! I give this to help others live more comfortable lives."

"I have been blessed with enough and more in my life. With grateful thanks, I share with others who have not been so fortunate."

We launched our new self-serve foodbank this year and many donors said they liked how it gave people food with greater dignity.

"Congratulations. The grocery shop is up and running, it's a great idea giving back dignity and choice to those who need help."

Many donors thank us for our work but we are proud of them for making it happen.

"I am very proud of the City Mission. Thank you for all you do."

"Thanks for the hope and comfort you provide."

Join our CareForce

CareForce is a group of generous, like-minded people who support us through regular giving. They are committed to ensuring we can make long-term commitments. It helps us provide vital services and support programmes which achieve results with far-reaching potential. CareForce donors make it possible for us to offer emergency care for people needing food, shelter, medical care, support with addiction and counselling.

To join our CareForce programme, please contact us on enquiries@citymission.org.nz



Thank you Bayleys

Our supporters come in all sizes and one of the biggest is Bayleys Canterbury. Over the year they have held food drives, a Plate Up fundraising event, a golf fundraising tournament and more food campaigns are coming for us this Christmas. We value all the help we receive from Bayleys - true champions!



Dr Amama Thornley, centre, thanked for her long service by City Mission community mental health nurse Julie Brine, left, and City Missioner Corinne Haines.

Doctor gifted us 35 years

“Life's not worth living if you don't consider people who are less fortunate than you are. If you can't give somebody a leg up, or if you can't share what you can spare, then you are not a part of the community you are living in.”

This is the heartwarming explanation Dr Amama Thornley gives when asked why she has given her time over an incredible 35 years to look after homeless people at the City Mission.

She retired from our voluntary doctor roster in September and we will miss her calm, caring and compassionate service.

In 1988 a group of doctors set up a once-a-week roster to volunteer and come in and look after our homeless clients in the shelters.

Amama was part of the group and she has continued her visits right through building a career as a GP

and raising a family and we are grateful for what she has given over those decades.

The volunteer doctors work closely alongside our Community Mental Health Nurse to check on the health of our shelter residents and take action when it is needed.

Amama says that can include providing medical certificates, prescriptions, treatment for colds, fungal infections, skin infections, bronchitis, urinary tract infections – problems which homeless people are particularly vulnerable to, plus giving referrals for other health services.

She was awarded a New Zealand Order of Merit in this year's New Year's Honours for services to health and is highly regarded in many areas including sexual abuse care, but it's how she has cared for our whanau that will be our lasting memory.

Amama says many Mission clients have been badly affected by the trauma of a horrendous childhood and she “always tried to talk to them as if they were my family, and I think they appreciated that”.

“They don't feel secure, they don't have a home or a place they can call home, they don't have parents or anyone they can trust, or turn to.”

She has just turned 80 and when she trained as a doctor very few women took that path. She remembers clearly that many people had the mindset that women students were taking a man's place at university, and this was a waste because they would only get married, have children and give up medicine.

She worked hard for many decades to prove that wrong and our City Mission clients have benefitted from her sense of purpose.

NOT ALL *Christmases* ARE EQUAL

Our City Mission staff know all too well how much need is out there and why our work is so important at this time of year.



“Alcohol is a major issue all year round for many of the people we see. But at Christmas it is much harder to keep away from alcohol because everywhere they go they see it promoted, it’s at work functions, and they are bombarded with messages to drink. Alcohol is all or nothing for them, and Christmas is very stressful. If isolation is a problem, being alone at Christmas makes it even worse because they can’t turn to the only thing that gives them relief. A lot of people relapse at Christmas.”

Raewyn, Community Detox Nurse

“We are seeing a big uplift in working people who are really, really struggling. Something has gone wrong, someone is out of work or has got sick, car has been stolen so they can’t go to work, so they are struggling to just meet the basics, but there is no support out there for them because they are just above the line to get that. Christmas is going to be so hard for them and I’m glad we can help a little.”

Kirsty, Foodbank



“With our clients, addiction comes with a lot of guilt and shame. And at Christmas that can really come home to roost. We are all told Christmas is a time of celebration and it is promoted as a time to get together with your family and friends, but with addiction those bridges are often well burned. A lot of our mums have no contact with their children at this time of year because they have lost their care. It can be a lonely, hard time for people suffering from addiction.”

Nicky, AOD Counselling

“People come in at Christmas time upset because they cannot believe they are in the situation where they need to come here for support. This can make them feel powerless not knowing how they are going to get through it. You can see the pain in clients from them knowing that they cannot provide for their family at Christmas. Many will get into debt to buy presents, just to make everything look okay on Christmas Day. Then they will spend the next few months paying that debt off. We help with the finance planning, but also provide emotional support, giving them the belief that they can get through this.”

Leanne, Financial Mentor



Prayer Power

Prayer for Ourselves

Lord, we give thanks as we come to the end of another year. We thank you for your love and guidance as we strive to use the gifts you have provided to support those who need our help. Keep us from being content with the way things are and may we be willing to give our love and support to those who need help.

Prayer for Togetherness

Lord, we pray that our Canterbury community shares the goal of protecting and enriching all lives. May the community's love and compassion flow for all whose lives are a daily struggle, often consumed with sadness and worry. May our activities over this Christmas lift them up at this stressful time.

Prayer for Healing

Heavenly Father, we pray for those who are struggling to remain free of drugs and mental health issues. May these people find a path away from isolation and despair and move forward towards relief and happiness. Give their supportive friends and family, and our City Mission team the strength to help them to keep focused on their path to recovery. We pray for all those deprived of fullness of life that they can experience the comfort of Your love.

Prayer for Children

Lord, we pray that all children feel loved and may they experience the joy of Christmas this year. We pray for a society where the young are nurtured with care and love. We pray for families who are under stress at this time of the year and we pray that those families remember the reason why Christmas is special and that love is the greatest gift of all.

Prayer for the Elderly

Heavenly Father, may Your community open its heart to the elderly who will be alone this year. We pray that they find company and kindness, and that they are honoured, feel wanted and valued, and that they can celebrate Christmas and Your special day in a supportive community.

Small miracles happen here every day

“How was it?” we asked David*.

He is one of our men’s day programme clients. Like most, David’s had a very hard life of trauma, trouble, constant stress, loneliness, poverty, and facing the daily grind of surviving in the small part of the world he can cope with.

As he tried to answer the question, emotion swept over him. He closed his eyes, clasped his hands over his heart, and was so overwhelmed he couldn’t speak. Finally, he said he had been blown away, utterly mesmerised. He was happy.

So what had we given him?

The Christchurch Symphony Orchestra regularly gives us 10 complimentary tickets for our clients when they hold a major concert in the Town Hall and this time David, who had never heard a full orchestra live before, joined the group.

Alongside our other men and women, he sat in the audience, feeling accepted and part of an uplifting public occasion. Then he felt the power of the full orchestra – musician experts working closely together to create great, beautiful moments. They played Beethoven’s Fifth.

David’s world had opened a little and he saw and felt things that went very deep.

We help so many with important basic things, like food and a bed, but we also try to lift the spirit. And that night we did.

**Name changed to protect privacy.*



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