



Vanessa* chooses life, thanks to her school chaplain

Bracken Ridge State High School chaplain, Stephanie Sweetman, recently shared this story...

Last year a girl came to our school. Vanessa* was violent, aggressive and anti-social. As a school chaplain, I was warned not to expect any improvement in her behaviour as she had been like that at previous schools. She had never opened up to anyone.

Vanessa had lived in many different foster homes and she had worked with a number of social workers over many years. When she enrolled at our school she was living with three other girls her age as well as with a social worker. Paint sniffing and self harm was a part of their normal routine.

I started to chat with Vanessa in the playground. I asked her questions like 'What are you into?' and 'What do you like doing?' Over time she slowly began opening up to me.

One day Vanessa began talking to me and she shared some things with me. Soon after that she confided in me that she planned to commit suicide. I looked at her and said, "Please don't do that! That would devastate me! You are such a valued person!"

A week later she came to see me. Her eyes were teary. She held out a small Mars Bar as a gift (she couldn't afford more than that) and said, "I want to give this to you. When I told you last week that I wanted to commit suicide, I didn't think you or anyone else would care." She then informed me that she had decided against it.

We saw each other a lot after that. She became quite bubbly and friendly towards me. I even kept tabs with her over the Christmas school holidays to make sure she was okay.

The challenge for Vanessa now, is that she still lives with the girls who are sniffing paint and are into self harm. But I've been encouraging her to hang in there. When she turns 18 next year she'll be able to move into her own place, away from the negative influences of the other girls. "You haven't got long to wait now!" I tell her.



School chaplain Steph Sweetman helped Vanessa* decide against suicide.

When I look back on when I first met Vanessa, it's obvious she's come a long way. These days she comes to see me every day to say hi, and she's always sharing little bits of news with me. She definitely brightens my day!

*Vanessa's real name has been withheld to protect her privacy.



School Chaplain's Profile

Name: Jonny Hedt
Age: 30
Married to: Tricia
Kids: Malachi (20 months) and Theo (3 months)
School: Yalata Anangu School, South Australia (3 days a week). Yalata is a Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal community located in the remote North West of South Australia.
Career and qualifications before chaplaincy: BSc at Monash University. I was also a Journalist for four years.

Why did you become a school chaplain?
My wife and I returned from overseas and we'd been working mindless jobs for a couple months. I wanted to get involved in meaningful work and when my wife's aunt told us about a school chaplaincy position in Yalata, I immediately knew this was the career for me.

What are the typical activities you do at school?
I read stories and sing action songs before school, join classes for literacy, maths and cooking, open the sports shed at recess & lunch and play with the students, help with behaviour management and assist the Principal with what needs to be done.

How many students would you see and engage with during a week?
This can range between 40 and 70 per week. It all depends what is happening at that given moment.

What feedback have you received from parents?
Parents aren't big on feedback. It used to really bother me until it sank in that everyone speaks English as a second language and Pitjantjatjara has no word for "thank you". The people here vote with their feet, so when parents ask me to talk to their children about something, back me up, or attend one of my community events, then I know they support me.

School chaplaincy has many "ah-ha" moments. Please share some highlights:
When I arrived three years ago, I was flat out in the office trying to stop kids fighting and throwing rocks at each other. Now there are hardly any fights and at least eight of those students have grown up into lovely children and teenagers and are now positive role models. It's been a privilege to be a part of their journey.

What people are saying about NSCA* school chaplains...

"I have always been a strong supporter of the role of chaplains in our schools, because they make a difference." – Prime Minister Kevin Rudd

"Having a chaplain has changed the ethos of our school for the better." – Principal

"Our school's chaplain is a second parent when I am not around." – Parent

"Chaplains are able to dig a little deeper than what we have time to do." – Teacher

"Our chaplain makes you feel good about yourself as a teacher." – Teacher

*National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) providers: ACCESS Ministries (VIC); GenR8 Schools Ministries (NSW); Scripture Union (QLD); Scripture Union (TAS); Scripture Union (ACT); Schools Ministry Group (SA) and YouthCARE (WA).

PM extends school chaplaincy funding to December 2011

In November 2009 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced his strong support for chaplaincy by extending National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) funding in its existing form to December 2011.

The PM, who previously referred to chaplaincy as 'the glue which keeps school communities rolling', said at the announcement in Canberra that chaplaincy was quiet work. "School chaplaincy isn't noisy work – it's quiet work. Yet it's the work that builds the nation."

The PM's announcement gives certainty to over 2700 government and non-government schools across the Country which presently access this service and was widely welcomed by NSCA member organisations.

Nerida loves building a sense of community in the school – and beyond

Nerida Holmes, chaplain at Safety Bay Senior High School says she loves her job which gives her the chance to make a meaningful difference to people's lives, build a sense of community and journey with students through whatever they are facing.

"It is an awesome responsibility and a wonderful opportunity to be one of the people who speaks into and shares their lives. I love having the chance to cultivate the personal and social wellbeing of students, their families and staff in need of support."

Her sentiments - that school chaplains build a sense of unity within their schools and the community – are confirmed by recent WA school chaplaincy statistics. In 2009, school chaplains recorded over 144,000 casual pastoral care contacts with primary and secondary school students. These contacts could be through interaction on the playground, in the classroom or on a camp.

"I am honoured by the opportunity to support students as they deal with relationship problems at school or at home. I love celebrating with them as they get their first job, change to a better class or catch up with their mum whom they hardly ever see. I enjoy being that constant in their lives, someone who accepts them for who they are, yet also encouraging them to reach their full potential."

Safety Bay Senior High School Principal Jenny Firth said the school chaplain provided much needed support for students. "It's important for a school such as ours to have a chaplain who works tirelessly to provide a wide range of support to our students including emotional support, family crisis support, grief counselling as well as capacity building and leadership programs to help develop our future leaders."

• Following the announcement of the extension of NSCP funding to December 2011, Local WA member of Federal Parliament, Gary Gray re-affirmed his support for school chaplaincy. Various schools in Rockingham and Kwinana have benefited from chaplaincy services under the National School Chaplaincy Program. Safety Bay Senior High School received \$60 000 at an official handing-over ceremony. Mr Gray said as a father of school-going boys, he was aware of the day to day challenges faced by them. "The role that the school chaplains are playing to help students negotiate the often complex nature of school life and growing up, is so important."

YouthCARE

WA



SMILES ALL ROUND... Safety Bay Senior High School chaplain Nerida Holmes (seated), Ms Jenny Firth (Safety Bay SHS Principal) and Dean Freitas (Year 11) were thrilled with the \$60,000 from Gary Gray (local member of Federal Parliament, centre) in support of the National School Chaplaincy Program within their school.

Riots and restoration

Rob Hodgson is school chaplain to three schools in South West Sydney. "Two years into this role there have been many stories and incredible experiences," he says.

In January 2009, the Rosemeadow riots at Campbelltown received a lot of media attention. The riots had considerable impact on one of Rob's schools with many students and families affected and needing his support.

The crisis also highlighted the need for liaison between various welfare and pastoral services, including the school chaplain's. Rob stresses the good work they did together for the community's well-being through this time.

Rob works closely with principals, counsellors & staff in his work. "Schools are central to the community. A school

chaplain can be an effective part of early intervention, lending an ear or picking up the pieces," he says.

"I can talk to the kids. They don't see me as the school counsellor and I can come from a different angle. It's a brilliant opportunity for early intervention.

"I feel the [chaplaincy] program needs to be expanded in the Macarthur area. I think there are a lot of schools that would benefit from a program like this.

"There are many challenges in being a school chaplain, but I have received wonderful support and acceptance in my role within each school. It is a privileged position to be in. School communities - especially young people - are our future and need this ongoing support."

GenR8 Schools Ministries

NSW



Photo: Carlos Furtado, Macarthur Advertiser

Someone to turn to: Rob Hodgson is a chaplain at Airds High School, John Warby Primary and Ambarvale Primary.

Celebration, caring and nurturing – all in a day's work for Tasmanian school chaplains

Tasmania packs a punch for its size, with beaches, wilderness, mountains and more, all on one small island. This diversity is not limited to natural features - school chaplaincy sports a similarly broad array of expressions across the State. In urban, rural, primary, secondary, large and small schools, chaplains are finding unique ways to fulfil their mission.

Lorraine Andrews is a case in point. As the chaplain for Distance Education Tasmania (DET), she works all over the State with students who study at home due to geographical isolation, illness, inability to work in the classroom or pregnancy. She noticed pregnant girls were particularly disengaged and their needs largely ignored. In consultation with DET staff, Lorraine developed a care package containing a bear wearing a 'You Are Special' t-shirt, a copy of Bernadette Black's story of teenage pregnancy, 'Brave Little Bear', a pregnancy information booklet, and pamphlets about local support groups. Where possible, a DET teacher personally delivers this package to each student. Lorraine also arranged a 'You Are Special' day at the end of 2009, at which Bernadette Black spoke. Students were pampered with neck massages and learnt baby massage. As a result, several pregnant students have now participated in other DET activities and a study program has been developed specifically to meet the needs of new mums. Students and teachers have been encouraged by Lorraine's creative ideas.

Pete Stone, chaplain at Huonville Primary and High School, takes a completely different approach. Basketball is more his style and he has coached five teams for the past two years. Through after school training and participation in a local competition, Pete is able to work closely with students, developing meaningful relationships with them and their families. He has even paved the way for students to meet the professional basketball team, the Hobart Chargers, with all the encouragement that brings. Apart from developing a group of enthusiastic and skilled basketballers, Pete has observed other positive outcomes in students. Their interpersonal skills and confidence have grown and teamwork is becoming a way of life.

Scripture Union

TAS



School chaplain Pete Stone develops meaningful relationships with students and their families through one of his passions, basketball. He is pictured with the Huonville High School Basketball team he coaches.

School chaplains run great programs, but there are also opportunities to speak specifically about spirituality, when being asked. Helen Ridley, who has worked at Ogilvie High School, a State girls' school, for five years, is one chaplain well versed in doing this. She was invited by the school to present activities which encourage students to become conscious of themselves as spiritual beings, or of their spiritual "part". Through the exploration of connectedness to self, others, nature and the beyond, Helen has seen students grapple with issues of faith, values and ethics. Some have identified their own spirituality and realised they are already fostering it. Helen's work is about helping students achieve wholeness.

The coastline of Tasmania wraps around the State's natural features in the same way that the vision for chaplaincy ties Lorraine, Pete, Helen and every school chaplain together in purpose. Their vision is to bring hope and purpose to communities. Through celebrating diversity, caring for the vulnerable and nurturing the spiritual dimension of each person, that is exactly what is happening.

Many happy 'chappies' in Queensland

Hamburglar showed he has a soft heart by getting behind Scripture Union's McChappy Day in Cairns on Saturday 22nd May.

Eight McDonald's restaurants in Cairns combined to run McChappy Day to support local school chaplains during Chappy Week. \$1 from the sale of every Big Mac, Quarter Pounder, McChicken Burger and salad was donated to local school chaplaincy programs in Cairns.

Keith McKinnon, school chaplain at Cairns State High School, reported that local schools decorated each of the eight McDonald's restaurants with their school colours. Some of the in-store entertainment included face painting, balloon sculpting, games, a school big band and other musical acts. Chaplains collected cash donations from customers through chappy tins on counters.

Hot FM, a popular Cairns commercial radio station, promoted McChappy Day with live crosses, interviews with school chaplains and a live auction.

"This was a huge day for school chaplains in Cairns. We want to thank the local McDonald's franchise owners for their support of school chaplaincy through McChappy Day," Keith said.

School chaplains involved included Carla Pappas, Wayne Green, Massey Dixon, Andrew Boardman and Margaret Kalusevicius.

- A walkathon called Ks4Kids was held on Gold Coast beaches during Chappy Week. Hundreds of businesses donated proceeds to local school chaplaincy programs around the State. Many McDonald's restaurants ran McChappy Week or McChappy Day. Many Coffee Club stores hosted Chappy-cino Day, selling 'chappy-cinos' (cappuccinos) to raise money for their local school chaplains.



Hamburglar showed his softer side during McChappy Day in Cairns.



Chappy-cinos give chaplains a lift

Barry and Jenny Lane, who own and run three Coffee Club stores in the southern suburbs of Brisbane, are big supporters of school chaplaincy. Their stores in Springwood, Loganholme and the Mega Centre were involved in Chappy Week in May. Proceeds from chappy-cino sales in their stores went to SU Qld's school chaplaincy programs in the local area.



'Back to School' – A school chaplain makes all the difference

What did the words 'Back to School' mean to you as a child? For Emily*, 'Back to School' is terrifying. She is crying out for a school chaplain.

Her family had just broken up. To make a new start, Emily's mother took the children far from the home and friends she knew. Emily didn't understand why her friends were ripped from her life. So she blamed herself. She thought she wouldn't have any friends anymore.

Going back to school in a new place was dreadful for Emily. Deeply insecure, she became disruptive and aggressive. She was just a step away from being a bully or bullied.

No-one could reach her. Not her mother, nor the school. Thankfully, though, Emily's school had a chaplain.

Gently, with great sensitivity, Emily's school chaplain helped her see that she hadn't lost her friends. They still liked her – and this gave Emily the confidence to settle down, overcome her fears and make new friends.

"It is just so rewarding to see her happy in the playground," her school chaplain said.

* Name has been changed to protect the privacy of the individual concerned. Photograph for illustrative purposes only.

Anne's supporting kids of all ages and abilities

Being recognised and greeted by your students is a given for many chaplains, yet it is Anne Ranse's greatest joy.

"Nothing is more rewarding than being greeted by students who call my name and reach out to me with joy and recognition," said the chaplain at the Black Mountain School for students with special needs. The school has around 124 students, ranging from 12 – 20 years in age, who have moderate to severe disability.

"The students require a great deal of support and assistance and I also provide chaplaincy services throughout the school – for students, staff and parents."

Anne, who has been a school chaplain at Black Mountain for the last 18 months, said that the extra day at the school (provided for her by Scripture Union) has allowed her to do far more than the original two days. "The task is far greater than me and my three days that I am here, but I do what I can in the time I have. I know that my presence and support in the classrooms of the disabled is valued and appreciated."

However, Anne's chaplaincy services extend beyond the school gates. She visits families who are struggling, often taking a meal with her. She is teaching a class to sing and the group will soon perform at the school assembly.

"We have learnt to sing a song we have written called 'Kid's of Black Mountain, that's who we are,'" she said.

She is also engaging and assisting the student representative council in the school and has developed a program with the school counsellor for young girls/women to assist them with their social skills and appropriate behaviour.

"Some of our students go on school camp to Berry in NSW, which is an incredible five days where students require help in all areas during their day. My attendance makes a difference."

Black Mountain Principal, Frank Fogliati says that the school community overwhelmingly supports the chaplaincy program at the school.

"Since its inception in early 2008, chaplaincy at Black Mountain School has actually exceeded the school community expectations detailed in our initial application. A greater than anticipated number of parents and families are now accessing the services of the chaplain."





Member Profile

Name: Haydn Lush

Organisation: Schools Ministry Group (SMG), South Australia

Position: Executive Director

How long have you been in this position: 4 years

Previous occupation: School chaplain for 9 years and then Chaplaincy State Coordinator for 5 years at SMG.

Community Awards / Other: Two South Australian 'Young Citizen of the Year' awards for work with disadvantaged youth, the establishment of youth centres and youth networks in South Australia.

Number of SA chaplains: 307

Number of SA volunteers: 1,000+

What motivates you? I am continually driven by my passion and dream to enhance and support the lives of young people in schools from all social and cultural backgrounds, as well as encouraging and supporting others who are longing to reach out and care for the next generation.

Why are you so passionate about school chaplaincy? Being a young person can be full of challenges and opportunities. There are so many factors that can influence their choices, which are not always positive and beneficial. Having worked as a school chaplain for nine years, I looked into the lives of young people, seeing their pain and at times a sense of hopelessness as they navigated their way through their search for identity, with the challenges of family breakdown, peer pressure, experimentation and so much more. I was able to walk alongside young people, supporting them in their life journey and providing them with hope and value. Now as the Executive Director, I am able to assist school communities across the State in having access to a school chaplain as a positive adult role model who can journey with students and provide them with the care, hope and value they need in life. The Chaplaincy program is complementary to services that often exist in schools and provides that extra dimension of care that is so important.

"Chaplaincy is a relatively new phenomenon in NSW and the extra funding from the Federal Government to December 2011 is consolidating chaplains' valued role within their schools. There is considerable pent up demand for chaplains in hundreds more NSW schools and I urge the Federal Government and the Opposition to consider the need and demand in NSW and all the other States for increased funding to develop school chaplaincy significantly beyond 2011."

- **Peter Robinson,**
CEO of GenR8 Schools Ministries, NSW

High acclaim for NSCA school chaplains in national research

"School chaplains offer a vital service that should be available to all schools."
- National study

WHAT PRINCIPALS SAY

According to the 688 principals who participated in Australia's first ever national study on the 'Effectiveness of Chaplaincy as provided by the National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) to Government Schools in Australia', school chaplains helped to:

- build the sense of community in the school, support the school ethos and
- assist with the integration of potentially 'at risk' students, including recent immigrants and Aboriginal students.
- 98% of those principals said that chaplaincy was making a major contribution to school morale; it was proactive, unique, effective and important. They urged that Government funding for school chaplaincy should be continued when the three year cycle of project funding ended.

The quantitative and qualitative study, commissioned by the National School Chaplaincy Association (NSCA) involved feedback from school principals, chaplains, teaching staff, parents and students.

The research also found that chaplaincy in government schools was not only unique, proactive and effective, but also a neutral and non-judgmental service that added long term value to the wellbeing of Australian school communities.

The research findings confirm that the role and impact of school chaplains in government schools is 'a winning formula'. Chaplains are often able to make an important contribution in linking the school with the wider community. This is particularly significant in rural and isolated areas where chaplains are more likely to be living in the local community, being able to bring support within the school for community projects.

The study found that school chaplains were accessible and approachable, dealt with a wide range of issues ranging from behaviour management, social and family relationship issues to matters relating to social inclusion and racism.

"By extending funding for the program the Prime Minister and Deputy PM both recognise the long term value and significant contributions of school chaplains to government school communities. Our chaplains are part of the schools' student support services team, have a non-disciplinary role within schools and are able to dig a little deeper than what teachers and other staff members have time for. The program benefits and impacts on Australian communities."

- **Stanley Jeyaraj, National Convenor of the NSCA and CEO: YouthCARE, Western Australia**

"Chaplains in schools add a dimension of care that is not offered by any other service. They work with other support and leadership staff to enhance the wellbeing of students, staff and families involved in the life of the school. It is vital that the Federal Government continue and extend their commitment to funding this program that meets the needs of people at the grass roots of society – our schools."

- **Evonne Paddison, CEO: ACCESS Ministries, Victoria.**

"It was thrilling to be present and hear the news first hand, including the PM's strong endorsement for the program, expressing in very positive terms the value of the program for children in schools. The PM also provided very clear indications that this, or a similar program, would exist beyond that period; following a Departmental Review to be undertaken in 2010. He noted that the Program had not met all the needs of particularly; 'rural, regional and disadvantaged schools', which potentially opens up a discussion for an expansion."

- **Craig Webber, CEO: Scripture Union, ACT**



UNITED IN THEIR SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL CHAPLAINCY... Mequa Hill (grade 7) Andrea Bolten (school chaplain, Kununurra District High School), Rick Bolten (grade 8), Kim Moore (school chaplain, Kununurra District High School) and Saeed Amin (Principal, Kununurra DHS) are united in their support for school chaplaincy. Kununurra District High School Principal Saeed Amin said the National School Chaplaincy Program has enabled the school to employ a second chaplain. "This has been extremely valuable in increasing the level of support that is offered to the school community."

WHAT CHAPLAINS DEAL WITH:

- 82% had run needs-based programs such as handling of grief or behavioural management;
- 79% of chaplains said they had engaged in off-site visits to parents and care-givers;
- 73% had led in school events or special ceremonies and
- 49% had participated in school camps.

Chaplains indicated that in the two weeks prior to the survey, the following issues were raised by students themselves, by staff in referring students to them, or by themselves in advising students:

- 95% of chaplains reported dealing with behaviour management issues such as anger;
- 92% with bullying and harassment;
- 92% with peer relationships and loneliness;
- 91% with student-family relationship issues;
- 85% with sense of purpose and self esteem;
- 81% with grief and loss;
- 77% with community involvement and social inclusion;
- 76% with spirituality and 'big' picture' issues of life;
- 72% with mental health and depression;
- 50% with alcohol and drug abuse and
- 44% with self harm and suicide.

For the full report go to:
www.socialsurvey.com.au/chaplaincyeffectiveness.pdf

What is the NSCA?

The National School Chaplaincy Association is a network of Christian chaplaincy organisations in Australia. It is represented by ACCESS ministries (VIC), GenR8 Schools Ministries (NSW), Schools Ministry Group (SA), Scripture Union (ACT, QLD & TAS) and YouthCARE (WA).

The NSCA's member organisations are separately incorporated bodies in each jurisdiction and have diverse approaches to school chaplaincy. However, each organisation is committed to Christian values and to providing access to chaplaincy through their services to school communities.

Formed 10 years ago, the NSCA informs Government and the community about the vital contributions of chaplaincy services to school communities throughout the country. NSCA member organisations collectively employ chaplains in over 1,650 schools representing 85% of all National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) funded positions in State schools throughout Australia.



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