



Christmas is

A journey of the heart

Bringing peace, joy and happiness to all.



2011 may go down in the annals of Queensland's history as 'a summer of sorrows', caused by a 'season of natural disasters'. But for me, courage and the generosity of human spirit will be forever etched in my mind and heart when I reflect on the year.

In an increasingly secular society, those great words "Love your neighbour" were lived out in a way never seen in Queensland. From the despair and shock of loss rose loving kindness; thousands of mud soldiers armed with mops, buckets and goodwill. For all the heartache and mess the floodwaters created, they also washed away barriers. Young and old, Australian residents and overseas backpackers, city and country: we all shared vulnerability and humanity and pitched together to help rebuild and to get life back on track.

Of course the need for support didn't recede with the waters — or with the media spotlight. Downs & West Community Support (DWCS) and our small band of volunteers continue to provide encouragement, a listening ear and pastoral and practical support to families, many of whom are still displaced, living with family or friends or in caravans. We don't do this for the thanks — but I would like to share a couple of the many thank-you's received, because your support and random acts of kindness make what we do possible all year round:

"I cried as we opened the box of groceries and saw the toys for my children. Thank you for the loving wishes and prayers at this terrible time in our lives. Your support of us will never be forgotten."

"I do not have the words to describe how grateful we are for the help given us. I worked at St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne and now you are helping me and my family...we really are family, aren't we?"

"We cannot thank you enough. You have given many families so much joy and lifted their spirits. To the students and volunteers who have put those hampers together, you have made the children in our community some of the happiest kids in the country and the messages on the bags were truly touching. We thank God for people like you."

I would like to thank the group of rural organisations who worked with DWCS and planned functions, family visits and made referrals in an effort to respond to the expressed needs of the people.

With gratitude and love in my heart, I wish you and your families a very Happy Christmas and a New Year filled with hope, peace and wonderful surprises.

Christine rsc

Sr Christine Henry rsc
Coordinator of the Downs & West Community Support

Message from our Chairperson



Being even a small part of the Downs & West Community Support work is a very rich experience. As someone who benefited from both primary and secondary education by the Sisters of Charity, working with Sr Christine is like the completion of a circle of love and support. Her energy and love of country people are contagious! We look forward to the monthly reports and many emails through which Sr Christine brings passion and life to the issues facing people living in regional and remote areas of Queensland.

My thanks extend to the advisory committee members who provide advice and support, enabling Downs & West Community Support to continue providing the pastoral, emotional and practical support for our country people:

- * Denis McMahon, sharing his legal skills and his long and rich understanding of the needs and challenges of rural communities
- * Terri Hillenberg, our financial guru, for ensuring good financial governance
- * Madelyn Priddle, adding a youthful perspective and marketing skills.

I also take this opportunity to thank our supporters and volunteers who, through their generosity, help to bring about change in the lives of many. For this we are truly grateful.

Our prayers and best wishes are with you this Christmas and for the New Year.

Cate Mapstone AM
Chairperson of the Advisory Committee



Drought, dust storms, flood... **what next?**



I have just one wish for the people of the bush in 2012, and that is for an 'average' year. I am not being miserly. There's no hint of Scrooge in wanting this. It's simply what we need to recover!

Late last year, the indicators were there that we were in for a wet summer. We just didn't know how wet. Folk from Boulia, who'd told me of a dust storm blowing a 6" drift of dust against the veranda door called to tell me about a foot of water! So many farmers and graziers saw years of work washed away. *Yet everyone pulled together to rise again. With eyes half-shut to the blinding dust, and necks to the yokes bent low, the beasts are pulling as bullocks must....* or so the poem goes. (The Team by Henry Lawson)

Autumn brought sensible rain and the bush moved apace. We planted a big wheat crop, saw pasture grow and livestock fatten. One of the greatest cotton crops was picked. Late planted summer cereals yielded well and spirits lifted. A warmer than normal winter — with a few late frosts to damage some wheat and barley— followed and a mid-spring heatwave; winter cereals harvested well.

That's why I'm wishing for an 'average' 2012 weatherwise – so that we can concentrate on other issues affecting our viability like the supermarket milk price war.

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In 2011, Downs and West Community Support received:

- ✚ \$19,034 in cash donations from individuals, schools and organisations (a significant result given that we do not have tax deductibility status)
- ✚ \$25,000 from St Vincent's Health & Aged Care Ltd plus use of a 4WD vehicle and storage for items pre-delivery to the country
- ✚ \$8,944 in grants from Catholic Religious Australia Queensland (\$4,944), Sisters of Charity Foundation (\$2,500) and Conference of Leaders of Religious Institute NSW (\$1,500)
- ✚ \$3,671 from fundraising events held at Marycrest, Kangaroo Point and St John the Baptist Retirement Community, Enoggera and Toowoomba Heritage Agricultural Show
- ✚ \$117,525 in-kind donations of household goods, gifts and magazines.

Such generosity came as a result of word-of-mouth and quiet evidence of our efforts, not through advertising campaigns.

We put these donations to good use, helping others on the Downs, Lockyer Valley and Burnett in many ways:

- ✚ 1,158 women attended Wellness Days in 17 locations
- ✚ 27 country women attended an 'all expenses paid' live-in weekend health and wellness retreat
- ✚ 25 women attended the Country Seniors/Retired Farmers Day Out
- ✚ 50 families received pre-paid petrol vouchers and 29 families received grocery vouchers
- ✚ 5 families, whose financial difficulties meant phone and power bills went unpaid, were reconnected to these basic services
- ✚ Funded 250 primary school children in rural schools to attend a Health and Life Education program
- ✚ 15 people received gift vouchers to a Christmas Dinner celebration at a restaurant
- ✚ Thanks to in-kind donations, DWCS distributed 478 household hampers, 602 Better Homes & Gardens magazine and 110 families received Christmas gifts listed on their 'Christmas wish list.'

And then there was the flood relief effort, in Brisbane, Ipswich and west:

- ✚ 500 cups of tea, 800 mugs of coffee, 10,000 face masks, 100 mops and 50 buckets given to volunteers cleaning up streets around Kangaroo Point in Brisbane
- ✚ 298 families in flood-affected regional southern parts of Queensland directly assisted
- ✚ 761 loaves of bread, 20 saucepan sets, 200 hats, 200 pairs of thongs, 100 double beds, 200 single beds and five dinner sets delivered to recovery centres at Helidon, Gatton and the RNA in Brisbane
- ✚ 600 towel sets, 64 cutlery sets, 150 mugs, 15 dinner sets and other kitchenware collected from families moving into their refurbished or new homes.



Our volunteer, Marie, collecting fresh bread, for distribution to the Lockyer Valley

VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Would you like to help – wrap gifts, pack hampers, donate items for fund raising events?

What Wellness Days Out mean for country women



Through Wellness Days Out, held in 17 locations, 1,158 rural women experienced guilt-free time for themselves, focusing on their health and wellbeing: relaxation therapies, informed discussions on mental health and women's health issues; even access to pap smear testing. And then there was the companionship. Just one day created responses like this:

"My husband died last year so I was on the farm by myself when the waters rose and I had to sit it out until help came. My daughter knew I was okay but couldn't get to me. To be able to talk about it today has helped me realise that others are still feeling the same."

"This day has been a TOTAL gift to us. Thank you so much."

"I felt so humbled to be treated with respect. We had a wonderful time and you made us feel so special."

Downs & West Community Support travelled 37,650km delivering pastoral care and practical support to those in need.

Renewing old acquaintances

Loneliness bedevils many, particularly older Australians. Downs & West Community Support and members of the community brought 25 retired farming women together in Toowoomba for a day of fun, good food and lively company. Many were friends from way back — even childhood — but because of distance and lack of transportation, hardly ever saw each other. It was wonderful to see the difference a few hours' chinwagging could do!

"I have really enjoyed today. Maybe it was because I didn't have too much time to think about it and you cared for me so beautifully. Thank you for your generosity and kindness to us. It was lovely".



A gift of **\$40** provides one person with a bus and meal ticket to attend the seniors day out.

Turn loyalty points into Big W or Target vouchers. These could relieve some of the stress in times of emergency.

A gift of **\$300** will keep people connected - pay overdue phone or electricity bill and have them reconnected.

A gift of **\$50** provides petrol for a family to visit the extended family or attend a community event.

A gift of **\$250** provides a woman with funds to attend the 2012 QRWN Conference for the first time.

Dragonfly retreat: living in the moment



In the peaceful surrounds of the James Byrne Centre nestled in the range at Highfields, Toowoomba, overlooking the Lockyer Valley, 32 women gathered for a three-day, two-night retreat that was all about...them!



All lived on the land. Most worked on the land. Some had part-time jobs off the land to make ends meet. Some had suffered the loss of a loved one through death, separation or divorce. All were expert at caring for others. Yet while not one had complained about their 'lot', it was clear every single woman needed time to refresh and just be.

Our Dragonfly Retreat, funded by St Vincent's Health & Aged Care Ltd and Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, allowed participants to see a general practitioner, psychologist and registered nurse for health checks they had ignored (or not been able to get to simply because of cost or distance). Pampering was also called for. Mini facials, shoulder, back and head massages, foot spas and manicures were the order of the weekend as were song, dance, laughter and magical entertainment.



For the first time in a long time, they had time to 'just be', like a dragonfly, living in the moment.



All left rejuvenated in spirit. As participants told us:

"I am going home a changed person. I felt I had no more to give. Now I do."

"I found that offering the medical tests pap smear, mammogram and hearing test very effective in helping us to look after ourselves."

"This year has had many drawbacks regarding floods and financial problems but in all, it really has been an eye-opener to experience the warmth and love of not only family but strangers."



Marg, the talented Wearable Art designer



Opening ceremony - Discovering the light within

All creatures great and small



Downs & West Community Support delivered dry food and kitty litter to Whylaway Boarding Kennel at Helidon Spa after the Hammond family found themselves cut off with 20 feline and canine guests in January. Sr Jeannie Johnston takes up the story:

“Monkey Water Holes Creek is at the base of Whylaway Boarding Kennel. It’s normally a dry creek bed about 10 metres wide. On Monday, January 10th, the creek began to flow and by early afternoon, the water rose to about 8 metres above the culvert in a matter of 10 minutes. The water was raging through the creek and soon became a river causing the banks of the creek to break away, taking with them the only road access either side of the culvert. Whylaway Boarding Kennel was stranded.

“On Wednesday, the 19th, Brett Hammond phoned me: he needed a consignment of pet food delivered to Toowoomba the week earlier. Sr Christine and I picked up all the supplies and headed out to Helidon Spa. While the Warrego Highway was passable, the benefit of the 4WD was apparent as we travelled down the side road towards the kennels. Brett met us at the base of Whylaway. His daughter Nicole guided us on foot across the remaining section of the causeway while Brett spent an hour wheel-barrowing supplies from one side of the causeway to the other. Road access wasn’t restored for almost 10 weeks.”



Broken causeway to the boarding kennel



Nicole and her dad, Brett preparing to collect the dry food and kitty litter for the DWCS 4WD

Are you prepared for the coming storm season? Call SES – flood/storm emergency 132500

Deliverance!

South Burnett farmers Marg and Peter Enkelmann were hit by three record high floods which isolated them for almost a month from mid-December. Rather than evacuate, they stayed with their cattle and chooks. Marg recalls their reaction when Barambah Creek peaked just centimetres from entering their home: “Peter grabbed a bottle of wine, took my hand and said ‘Marg, let’s just enjoy our houseboat’ and with the sun setting over the water, pets by our side, there was a feeling of relief, happiness, love and acceptance.”

The next morning the Enkelmanns were delighted to find the first of seven round wrapped bales of hay washed over the barbed wire fence, ensuring the cattle’s survival.

Marg says of the community support given to help remove debris, re-fence and support her family: “2011 brought richness to our lives that we will never forget”.



Marg and Peter with their grandchildren after the floods

Turn loyalty points into grocery or petrol vouchers for people in need in regional and remote QLD.

A gold coin donation from members of a group/club/school is a contribution well received.

A gift of \$50 provides a child with swimming lessons or after school sport training.

Cheques to be made out to Downs & West Community Support

WEBSITE:

With the help of Dominic Mapstone, Downs & West Community Support is building its own WEBSITE. People in rural areas were invited to share with us how they accessed the net, how often, what for, and what would be most useful to them. The website is work in progress, with still more information to be loaded onto the site, however you are invited to take a look at www.downsandwestcommunitysupport.org

This site is being built for you so send in your comments, suggestions and information for us to consider.

Family goes to conference:

The Australian Wolf-Hirschhorn Syndrome Support Group hosts a conference every two years. Only 50 Australians have this genetic condition — and Downs & West Community Support sent one Queensland family to Ballarat to see what more could be done for their son, Nicholas. Father Grahame said hearing the latest research and having a one-on-one consultation with world expert Dr John Carey was “a lifetime dream”. The family also appreciated spending time with others who share lives affected by this mysterious ailment.

Tracy and Grahame with their children, Charlotte, Nick and Lachlan



Beating bush blues:

Mental wellbeing remains an issue in the bush. Rod Saal is managing two mental health projects in eight regions in southern Queensland:

1. Australasian Centre for Rural and Remote Mental Health's initiative *Building Bridges for Community Suicide Prevention* gives communities the support, guidance and resources needed to be better able to deal with the aftermath of suicide. Rod will be particularly involved in activities in Dalby and the Balonne district.
2. In conjunction with Queensland Mental health Alliance, the second project, called *Resilient Places*, will provide a secretariat and facilitation service for existing local networks of service providers in the Lockyer, Toowoomba, Dalby, Western Downs and Roma districts.

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A touch of Christmas.....A Boomerang of Flowers *by Mary Philip*

There was no snow in the *Outback*;
When Baby Jesus was born that night.
Just a mother singing dreamtime,
Saw the shining star so bright.
Now the children in the cities
are hanging lights upon the trees,
when it's Christmas in Australia,
Bringing joy to you and me.

*Chorus: When it's Christmas in Australia,
The Southern Cross shines bright,
From Darwin to Tasmania,
on a joyful Christmas night.*

They'll be ringing bells in Adelaide;
And Perth will shine her lights,
singing carols all through *Queensland*,
on that warm December night.
On Melbourne streets, at Sydney-town,
The jacaranda blossoms lie,

a purple mantle across Australia,
Beneath our southern sky.
The farmer and the city folk
all bow their heads and pray,
To Little Baby Jesus,
Born long ago and far away.
Just an infant in a manger,
who'll fill the world with love and joy,
when it's Christmas in Australia,
Peace to every girl and boy.

*Chorus: When it's Christmas in Australia,
The Southern Cross shines bright,
From Darwin to Tasmania,
on a joyful Christmas night.*

Ringing bells across Australia
on a joyful Christmas night.

Downs & West Community Support thanks the following who gave money, goods, time and energy to make our work possible in 2011:

Sisters of Charity of Australia
St Vincents Health & Aged Care QLD

Caritas Care
Marycrest and Lilian Cooper Aged Care facility
St Vincent's Hospital, Brisbane
Vincent's Hospital, Toowoomba
St John the Baptist Retirement community

Quota International, Taree
Parishioners of St Stephens, Tea Gardens
Pat and Alan and their volunteers, Murgon

Anonymous donors

Pamela Godsall-Smith and parents of the Shapland Swim School, Sinnamon Park
Jan Drake and donors, supporters and volunteers from St Veronica Welfare Committee, West End

Individuals who work tirelessly behind the scenes wrapping gifts, packing hampers and making a selection of items for fundraising events

Organisations who worked with DWCS and planned functions and family visits in rural and remote areas.

Mt St Michael's College, Ashgrove
All Hallows' College, Fortitude Valley

CRAqld
Sisters of Charity Foundation
Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal St
& Sylvia & Charles Viertel Charitable
CLRI-NSW

GIViT team and their supporters and donors
Applied Medical
QIA Social Bridge Club



Wishing you a very Happy Christmas and New Year



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