

# NEWSLETTER



## TURNING OFF THE TAP

**Coast Shelter staff work tirelessly to provide support and guidance to our clients so that they can move into and sustain their own accommodation. However we face an uphill battle on the Central Coast, because of a severe lack of affordable rental accommodation and more than 12 year waiting lists for Public Housing.**

Staff find it increasingly difficult to locate suitable rentals for our clients, the majority of whom have a very poor rental history. To overcome some of the discrimination our clients experience, Kara have set up a special 'dressing room' so that clients can dress up as though they are going to a job interview. The aim is to give a good first impression which is vital as the market is so competitive.

Clients are now staying longer in our refuges because it is so difficult to find affordable rentals. In 2009-2010 our clients stayed an average of 81 days with us. This is 22 days longer than the previous year and unfortunately it means that the longer our clients stay with us, the more people we have to refuse crisis accommodation to.

In 2009-2010 we were unable to assist 58% of homeless people seeking accommodation because we had no vacancies. This is 1,242 men, women, children and youth who had to continue living on the streets, on couches, in cars or in abusive situations while they waited for help.

It seems that no matter how many additional units of accommodation we source, the problem of homelessness continues to increase. We simply cannot keep up with the demand.

This critical situation in the community is much the worse than people realise. More and more people are coming to Coast Shelter's Community Centre as they



struggle to keep up with increased living costs. Luckily we are able to assist with electricity, pharmaceutical and food costs to help families avoid becoming homeless.

Much of the assistance provided through the Community Centre is what the Federal Government calls 'turning off the tap'. It recognises that a

single event may tip a vulnerable person or family into homelessness and that many factors usually combine to cause homelessness. The emphasis of the Community Centre is intervening early and providing a range of support to help people before they become homeless.

Unfortunately, the problem of housing for low income earners is quite complex. We all know that the cost of living far outstrips the meagre increases in fixed incomes and the chronic shortage of affordable housing for those on low incomes in Australia.

People can play with statistics as much as they like, but even with the extra 182 units of accommodation allocated to the Central Coast from the Housing Stimulus Package, waiting lists for Public Housing remain at between 12 and 15 years.

The answer to homelessness is not only in building new houses. It's also about 'turning off the tap' by providing extra support so that people can maintain their tenancies and avoid homelessness. This is exactly the kind of support Coast Shelter provides every day at our Community Centre in Gosford.

find us online at...

[www.coastshelter.org.au](http://www.coastshelter.org.au)



# MACK THE WONDER DOG !

The Kara Program would like to introduce their gorgeous 'Pets as Therapy' dog... Mack. He is a German Short Haired Pointer and is 1 ½ years old.



**Mack ready for duty at Kara**

Mack has been a vital part of the Kara team and has been a hit with clients, young and old alike.

Mack's patience, gentleness and goofy nature have won the children's hearts as they are drawn to the dog they have always wanted, or have left behind when they became homeless.

He has interacted with our children, some of which are challenged with autism and we have witnessed these children coming out of their shells, through talk, laughter or just being still.

Mack has comforted many women as they come through our doors, and he appears to sense their grief.

Mack is our unpaid worker, who works tirelessly all day just for a small payment of 'Schmackos' and leaves Kara exhausted.



## 'DREAMTIME' BECOMES A REALITY

**This is the story of Lockie, an Aboriginal Australian who grew up in Walgett and now stays in the Coimba Men's Program.**

As Lockie hit his teens, he developed an unquenchable thirst for alcohol. As his alcohol dependence progressed, his behaviour worsened and (as is typical) he began to hurt the most important people in his life. As a result Lockie became more and more isolated from his family, his people and his own spirituality.

Thankfully, Lockie was accepted into a Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre on the Central Coast. Here Lockie spent many months working on his recovery, after which he was accepted into the Coimba Men's Program and was offered a small bedsit in Gosford.

Lockie continued with his AA program and in January celebrated 12 months of continued sobriety. We warmly congratulate him on this achievement! He

has also been working tirelessly to put his life back together - even travelling back to his hometown where he made peace with the friends and the family he hurt.



Lockie has also been working hard on some magnificent Aboriginal artwork including canvas paintings and wood carvings - an area in which he is truly gifted. So much so, that he was invited to show his artwork at the Wollombi Valley Art Centre where he has already

sold a lot of his work.

Lockie will be staying with Coast Shelter until he regains his feet solidly. He said that "I am eternally grateful to Coast Shelter and its staff for the opportunity to build a solid base in the world and to continue my spiritual journey." We wish Lockie the very best for all he wants to achieve in the future.

## VOLUNTEERS COOKING UP A STORM

**Rumbalara Youth Refuge has welcomed some great new volunteers.**

Ruth and Helen offer their time and knowledge to come in and teach young residents cooking skills. Their experience in working at local high schools has been very beneficial and our residents have a ball working together to create some simply amazing meals. Helen has even donated a slow cooker to Rumbalara which is great for stews, soups and other dishes.

Another volunteer Maria has also offered her time to come in and teach the residents how to cook some beautiful curries and stir fries. Maria also gave each

of our residents a special Christmas present which they were all very grateful for.



Thank you to these lovely ladies for sharing their time and skills with us. It really makes a difference to the lives of our young residents and they are not only learning vital life skills, but also enjoying their time cooking with you.



## CENTRAL COAST HOMELESS FAMILY BROKERAGE SERVICE

Coast Shelter would like to introduce our Central Coast Homeless Family Brokerage Service which is being funded for 2 ½ years by Community Services (NSW Government).



The Brokerage Service aims to improve service coordination and housing security for homeless persons and those at risk of homelessness. It involves building partnerships and improving service coordination between government agencies, businesses and the not-for-profit sector.

A Brokerage Coordination Group will be responsible for evaluating referrals from agencies to broker a wide range of support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Brokerage Service will focus on providing support to:

- Indigenous families
- Women and children escaping domestic violence
- Single men and women with accompanying children
- Families exiting emergency accommodation
- Young people, with or expecting children
- People at risk of homelessness

It is an exciting and much needed new Service and Coast Shelter looks forward to providing improved results for people who are most in need on the Central Coast.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

**The 100th anniversary of International Women's Day was held on Tuesday 8th March. Coast Shelter joined in with the celebrations in Gosford and marched down Mann Street to Kibble Park.**

To continue the celebrations, Avoca Beach Picture Theatre held a Multimedia Spectacular on 12th March to raise money for Coast Shelter. The night included live stage performances, African drums, vocals, The Signing Choir, short films and featured the film Made in Dagenham. A huge thank you to Beth and her staff for organising such a wonderful event to celebrate International Women's Day and showcase some amazing local talent.



Laurie Maher,  
Executive Officer of

Coast Shelter said that although women's achievements over the years were indeed worthy of congratulations, there was still a long way to go in achieving social equity for women in Australian Society.

"On a day on which the achievements of

women in the economic, political and social fields is celebrated, it is indeed sad that in Australia 46,000 women slept on the streets of our cities and towns," Maher said.

In a country where we have the wonderful role models of a female Governor General, female Governor, female Prime Minister and female Premiers, we still suffer by comparison with other OECD countries in many areas of gender equity.

"It is up to Government and business to face up to

the issues of equal pay, conditions of employment which accommodate the family responsibilities of women, as well as a genuine commitment to employment and promotion based on merit, before we can truly claim to be a fair and just society," Maher concluded.

## PREGNANT YOUNG WOMEN PROGRAM

**Over the past twelve months, Maya Young Women's Refuge has received more than 50 referrals for accommodation from homeless pregnant teenagers. These young women have ranged in age from 12 to 18 years old.**

Unfortunately Maya doesn't have the resources or the room to accommodate these young women, but by adapting a 'can do' approach we have come up with a strategy which can provide accommodation and support for up to five young pregnant women at a time.

At this stage, Coast Shelter has no funding for this program, but with assistance from Pacific Link and with our new Central Coast

Homeless Family Brokerage Project, each young woman will be assisted to engage with other mainstream support programs to ensure both mum and her expected baby are given every assistance throughout the pregnancy and birth.

The success of this program is dependent on a coordinated approach of all relevant agencies and although it is only a small pilot program, perhaps it will be the forerunner of other programs which can address this very real need within our community.



## UPCOMING EVENTS

Keep an eye out for these upcoming events...

**1-10 April 2011**  
**National Youth Week**

**15 May 2011**  
**Century Challenge Cycle Tour**  
Hosted by the Rotary Club of Erina

**9-15 May 2011**  
**National Volunteer Week**

**4 June 2011**  
**Convoy for Coast Shelter**  
Hosted by the Central Coast 4WD Club with support from Aldi stores across the Central Coast.  
More information available soon!

**19 June 2011**  
**Getting Hitched Wedding Expo**  
Hosted by East Gosford Lioness Club

**1-7 August 2011**  
**Homeless Persons' Week**

**3 August 2011**  
**Homeless Persons' Memorial Service**  
Donnison Street Community Centre

**5 August 2011**  
**Slither and Slumber Sleep Out**  
Are you brave enough to sleep out with the snakes at the Australian Reptile Park?  
This event will raise funds for Coast Shelter and the IRIS Foundation to assist in the prevention of youth suicide.  
More details will be available soon...

**10 October 2011**  
**World Homeless Day**

**11 October 2011**  
**Coast Connect Day**  
Central Coast Youth Club, Niagara Park



## FIRST NILS LOAN PAID OFF!

The Community Centre has been offering a No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS) since March 2010 and we are happy to announce our first borrower has now paid off their loan completely.

Natasha\*, a mother of six, first came to the Community Centre in a distraught state seeking assistance with her escalating bills. She explained that she couldn't afford to register her car, which meant she was unable to get to work and her bills were getting out of control.

Natasha's situation first got out of hand when her fridge broke down and needed to be replaced, followed by her washing machine a few months later. In her desperation, she turned to a rental finance company and committed to a payment plan of \$224 per month for three years.

Initially, we assisted Natasha with electricity vouchers and gave her a food



hamper. We obtained a payout figure of \$498 for her appliances, which saved her around \$1,400 in the long run.

A NILS loan of \$868 was approved to cover her appliance payout and to pay for a green slip for her car. A loan repayment plan was set up with Natasha and she repaid \$35 a fortnight through Centrelink deductions.

Such positive outcomes were achieved for Natasha as a result of her loan. Her car was insured and registered which meant that she could resume her job cleaning houses. She also paid off her appliances much sooner and saved paying a lot of interest in doing so.

Natasha was so grateful for our assistance. Well done Natasha! \*Name has been changed

## KITCHEN IS COMPLETE

Progress has been slow but steady at 346 Mann Street, the site of the future Coast Community Centre. The kitchen may be complete, but there is still a way to go to finish the rest of the refurbishment.

With the assistance of Gosford City Council, Coast Shelter acquired the premises for the Coast Community Centre. This site is currently undergoing major refurbishment and when complete, will provide a greater range of services to homeless and vulnerable community members.

The entire project is worth \$1.6 million and with the assistance of Gosford City Council, the State Government and our own fundraising

efforts we have raised \$1.3 million so far. For the Coast Community Centre to become a reality, we still need to raise an additional \$290,000 to complete the project. We are hopeful that the Coast Community Centre will be opened before the end of this year.



*Charles and volunteers from the Donnison Street Community Centre inspecting their new kitchen.*