

THE SHAWLANDS CARAVAN PARK

by Jim De Witte



CRCA MINISTRY FORMATION
"A Church Reforming To Reach the Lost for Christ"
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Over the past couple of years the Dandenong CRC had the opportunity to support a group of local young people in a ministry they conducted in a local caravan park, the Shawlands Caravan Park. God provided an open door for the gospel in Shawlands, a caravan park situated in the south west corner of Dandenong. Dandenong's pastor, Jim De Witte, shares the story:



Dandenong CRC

In meeting with our *You Are Why* youth group (URY) they shared on their work in a local caravan park with residents who were living below the poverty line in quite derelict conditions. Their involvement was a monthly BBQ where they sat and talked with residents who came along.

Over time we began to support them financially in helping those people in need. We gave them movie passes to hand out. Why? When you live from day-to-day you do not get the opportunity to



The entrance to Shawlands Caravan Park

spend on luxuries like movies.

At Christmas 2007 the URY organised and packed 90 Christmas hamper packs and a range of children's gift packs with goods and money raised through the

congregation. The value of the packs was around \$5000 and we had great fun in making the packs and even more fun in distributing them and seeing people blessed with beautiful Christmas food and other goods.

There was the story of one man who was in tears when he received his hamper because he now had some chocolates he could give as a Christmas present to his children.

During 2008 we organised more special events such as Mother's Day pamper packs and the like. The young people who were holding the BBQ wound down their ministry and we had the God-given opportunity to pick up this work, and so, late in 2008 we formed a workgroup and began monthly BBQs in the park.

We really can see how God pushed us into the ministry in the park. As we started to help and be involved in work there God removed many obstacles on the way. The managers that came to the Park came with a real heart for the people and encouraged us to help in whatever way we could. Then God put in place a new lease holder, with an incredible



compassion for the residents and wants to see lives transformed.

Meeting with Howard is a joy and inspiration. Here is a non-Christian with a genuine heart for the poor and who has blessed us with so much as we work in the park together. Late last year he cleared an area at the bottom of the park, grassed it and placed a BBQ and chairs there. This became the setting for our gatherings and the place where we held a huge Christmas feast the Sunday before Christmas in 2008. There was food, presents, hampers and even Santa turned up for the children. It was a wonderful celebration and some friendships were formed between the residents and us, but also amongst the residents themselves.

What was needed was a community centre in the park so we could have a

more permanent presence in that community, so the workgroup started looking at options. It was then that Howard came to us with an offer of an old outside radio broadcast van that we could have at a very good price (\$8000). We could renovate it and he would place it



Anita De Witte and the newly renovated broadcast van.

wherever it was needed in the park. We grabbed this offer, especially because we could pay Howard whenever we had the money. A team worked hard to renovate the van, while we set about raising the funds needed to buy it.

We held a fundraising drive over a 6 week period in July/August. It began on a Sunday with an introduction to the quest and looking at using our talents for the kingdom. People were encouraged to take 'seed money' and grow it into in order to raise funds for the purchase and renovation of a special caravan to be used in ministry. This fundraising culminated in

a dinner auction night at which we all stood amazed at God's provision through the congregation. The amount raised far exceeded the amount required, breaking the \$8000 barrier!



The van has a pull out section which can serve as a stage.

The van was placed in the Park and we celebrated with the residents, giving them an opportunity to tell us how this community centre might be used, what they see as needs within their community. They have many wonderful ideas and we know that God is opening the doors to meet those needs. We run an Op Shop out of our church 2 days a week and a monthly amount from the shop revenues is put straight into the ministry at Shawlands Caravan Park. This van is the church in the park and we look forward to God doing great things through the relationships being built.

This is really exciting, but the question comes...why? Why get involved? Why put so much energy and resources into the park? Why try and help these people? We do it because God commands us to, and we honour God when we obey his commands (Deuteronomy 15:11;

Proverbs 14:3; Proverbs 19:17). God cares about those who are hurting. Jesus Christ was deeply moved with compassion when he came across people who were hurting. As followers of Jesus Christ we need to walk in his footsteps.

The mission into the park is about connecting with the people and bringing them to Jesus. As the quote goes, 'People don't care about how much you know, until they know how much you care'. We want to care for these people, loving them till they ask 'why?'. Remember, the gospel writer John points out: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children,

let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:17-18). Why should we do this? What's our obligation? John wrote: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers." (16) It is the love of Christ that compels us to do this work.

We do not do this ministry alone, but in the strength of the Lord, and with the partnership of everyone in the church. May God be praised through this ministry.