

# WORD ON THE STREET



Last week, the UNOH team gathered for prayer at our home and we meditated on some words from Charles Ringma that hit home: *"Empowerment means sharing, caring, solidarity, and partnership. It's not about just arriving; it's about the struggle, the journey, the faith, and the courage."* These words are not just rhetoric; they capture the very essence of our daily mission to walk this journey together. These ain't just fancy words; the journey together is the backbone of what we try to do every day.

Our neighbourhood has had its share of challenges and triumphs in engaging people. Reviving the Residents Association marked a significant step forward for us this year. What began as concerned neighbours troubled by speeding traffic in our streets has developed into a large group of angry and frustrated residents who are now demanding that something urgently happens. Last Sunday a 16 year old was killed in a tragic car accident on one of our streets (due to high speed). The Residents Association has now become an avenue demanding changes from local authorities.

But this isn't solely about traffic. It's also about working together and moving past the idea that we're just victims of our circumstances who lack power to bring change to a system that often marginalises our neighbourhood. We are saddened that it takes a tragedy to provoke the authorities to take action. This advocacy has awoken acknowledgement of the unique contributions each individual brings towards this challenge and the collective impact we can make when we unite together for the greater good. It's about understanding how a system works and using the system for the benefit of us all.

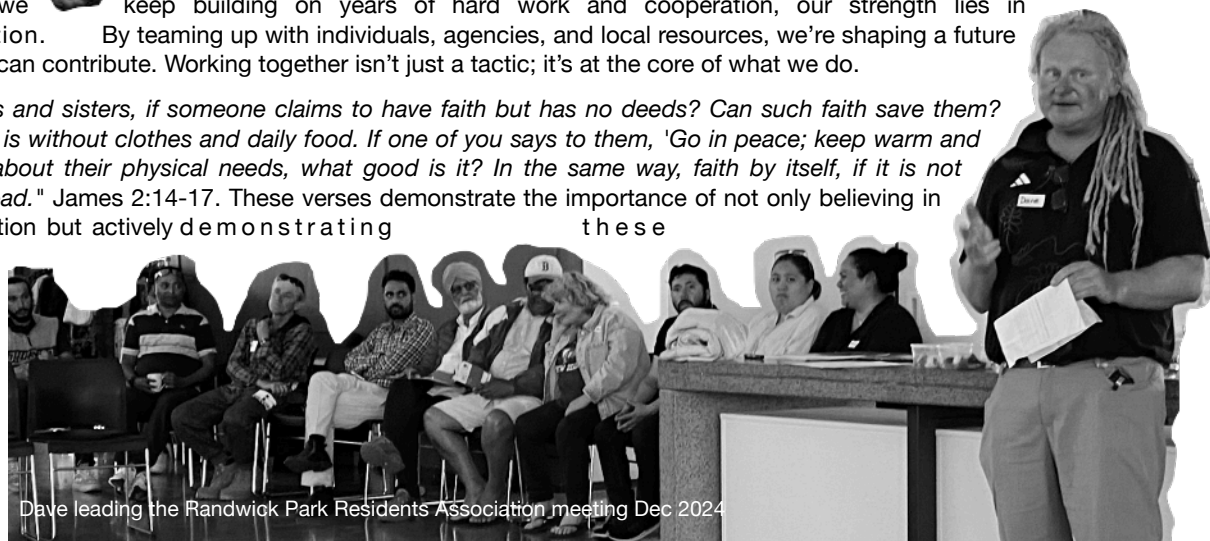
At UNOH, we firmly uphold the belief that empowerment is a collective endeavour. It requires walking on the journey together, strategising together, and accomplishing tasks as a unified neighbourhood front. In a world that often prioritises individualism and profit, we are here to show that collaboration and being connected with others, is a key ingredient for enabling collective good.

The pressing issues of loneliness and mental health serve as heart-breaking reminders of the importance of human connection. Recently Age Concern requested government to form a 'Ministry for Loneliness,' similarly to the UK. We're convinced that by working together, we can create a community where others feel they belong and can contribute.

As we keep building on years of hard work and cooperation, our strength lies in collaboration. By teaming up with individuals, agencies, and local resources, we're shaping a future where everyone can contribute. Working together isn't just a tactic; it's at the core of what we do.

*"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."* James 2:14-17. These verses demonstrate the importance of not only believing in empowerment and collaboration but actively demonstrating these values through tangible actions and deeds.

As we unveil the Urban Neighbours of Hope 2024 newsletter, we proudly present "The Power of Collaboration: Building on a Legacy of Positive Change." we pray you find **Hope** in the places you call Home.



Dave leading the Randwick Park Residents Association meeting Dec 2024

# Unexpected Gifts: A Journey of Faith, Community, and Grace

Written by Rebecca Rhodes

*"When I look at my friendship bracelet, I think about Tiare and I pray to God."* said Sally (not her real name)

*"Did you pray before you got the bracelet?"* asked Rebecca.

*"No, I never prayed before, but I pray every day now."*

A few months back, three of us leaders loaded up in a van with four intermediate-age kids and fought holiday traffic and Auckland road works to go to camp for a long weekend. Camp, from my perspective, was quite stressful. Our kids didn't show up to morning prayer on time. They sometimes refused to eat the food served to them. They seemed to be the only kids in the whole camp who would mysteriously be missing in action for chore time. I came home from camp exhausted and, if I am honest, a little disappointed. I thought God was going to transform our kids' hearts. I thought the three girls would get along with each other and want to hang out with me, the cool youth leader. I thought the four-hour drive home would be filled with spiritually enriching conversations and all seven of us belting out in harmony, "I am a friend of God... He calls me friend!"

My plans were not God's plans. There was no singing in harmony. There was little (visible) engagement with the devotionals or activities led by the camp directors. One morning, for instance, we were supposed to all make prayer bracelets. Everyone was supposed to get one of each colour bead, string it onto a thin cord, and tie it around your wrist. Each colour represented something or someone to pray for... leaders, friends, family, yourself. Our kids grabbed handfuls of beads, some spilled on the ground, they put the beads on the cord in the wrong order, and then our group (of course) finished late so we barely had time to pray.

I thought camp was a disaster.

**She eagerly started telling me about how she uses her 'friendship bracelet' (the prayer bracelets made at camp) to pray daily, and to reflect on all that she learned and experienced at camp.**

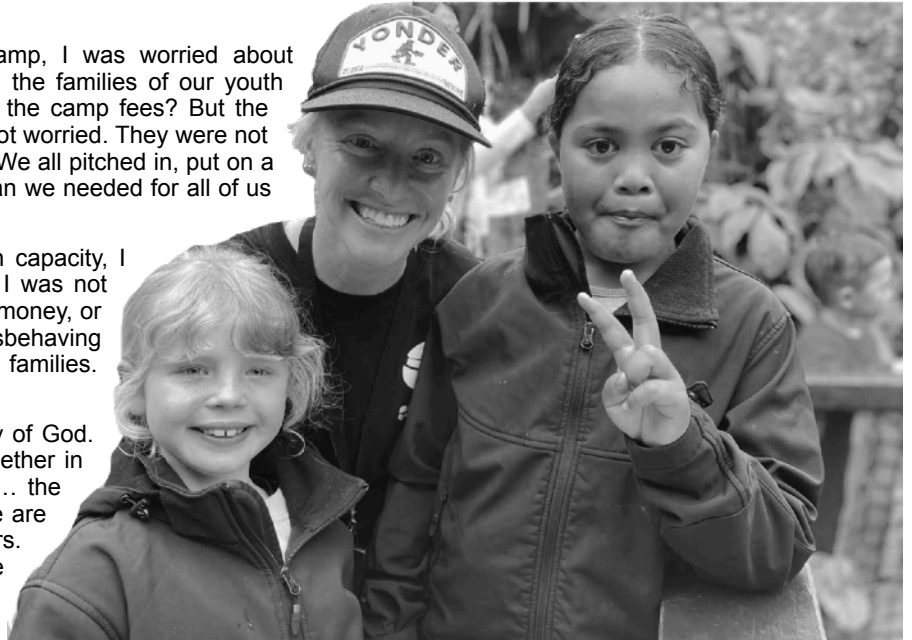
But then, a week later, I saw one of the girls walking down the street. We chatted, I asked her what she had done for school holidays, and she said, "I went to camp with you!" And she proceeded to recount story after story from camp, of how much fun she had, of what a meaningful time camp was. I saw another one of our campers a few days later. She eagerly started telling me about how she uses her "friendship bracelet" (the prayer bracelets made at camp) to pray daily, and to reflect on all that she learned and experienced at camp.

Faye and Steve, the other leaders for our group, didn't have the same experience as me at camp. They were not distressed. They were not disappointed. They led. They loved. They were a calm and joyful presence to our kids.

Before camp, I was worried about money. How would the families pay for camp? Could the families of our youth afford all the gear that they needed? Could they pay the camp fees? But the families of these kids were not distressed. They were not worried. They were not embarrassed to talk about money. "Rebecca, be chill." We all pitched in, put on a bake sale, and in one afternoon made more money than we needed for all of us to attend camp.

In my own thoughts, with my own energy, in my own capacity, I was not enough. I was not enough for our campers. I was not enough for these girls that I love. I didn't have enough money, or time, or energy, or wisdom to know how to manage misbehaving campers or navigate difficult money conversations with families. But as it turned out, I didn't need to have enough.

We are enough. Together. Under the grace and mercy of God. The Lord shelters us in His compassion, holds us together in His love, binds us to one another in abundance. We... the camp leaders, the kids, the families of those kids... we are community. We are collaboration. We are neighbours. We are fellow wanderers. We are needy and capable and kind and hurting and generous and selfish and made in God's image, reflecting His character, together.



## The Power of Collaboration: Working Together for Positive Change

written by Steve Molen

Faye and I have been part of UNOH for two years and have just completed UNOH training to become members of Urban Neighbours of Hope. We recently moved from the Randwick Park neighbourhood to establish a new Salvation Army/UNOH intentional community in Clendon Park East, a very oppressed part of Manurewa.

Reflecting on the past two years, I am reminded of the importance of collaboration and the growth that occurs when we partner with different organisations and denominations. Our Randwick Park UNOH team includes a rag tag bag of Baptists, Presbyterians, Elim and Salvationists all working together, (with only a few punch ups, mostly with Dave lol), learning off one another's collective intelligence and historical learnings. It's awesome to see how when God brings the body together the difference we can make.



One of the greatest gifts Faye and I have received from the team is the theology of place. As communities have grown and expanded over the years we have seen the emergence of commuter church, a gathering detached from the community with little connection to its local context. It's been exciting to learn the art of a neighbouring lifestyle, making time to get to know the neighbours, slow down, discern what the Spirit of God is saying and enjoy life with others.



One of our new rhythms is Thursday night dinner at the local community centre down the road from our house. We don't just go there for a free meal (although this is pretty cool), but to connect with our neighbours, make new friends, share stories, and hang out with those who live nearby. It's all about living out the theology of place, and we love it.

Another lesson from the power of collaboration is the value of partnering with existing providers rather than reinventing the wheel. Recently, we started working with a community group who is doing amazing youth work in the area. Instead of running youth programs from our building for our youth, we support and partner with those already doing the mahi. This approach is life-giving as we connect with others in the neighbourhood, share volunteers and resources and all work together to bring about transformation in the lives of our local youth.

We've also seen collaboration at play with our food co-ops. Instead of having just one co-op at our local church, we've planted multiple co-ops with different groups throughout the community, benefiting from combined buying power. That's collaboration at its finest.

We are so thankful to the Randwick Park team. They have taught us that through collaboration, we can achieve much more than if we minister in isolation. I have found if we can move beyond our own fears and insecurities and look for path ways to work with others we can accomplish amazing things for the Kingdom of God.

## CHOOSING TO BE A PASSENGER AND NOT THE DRIVER. *written by Denise Tims*

As I reflect upon community engagement, I am reminded of the importance and value of being a passenger in the back seat of a car rather than being the driver in the front. Within our own churches and ministries we tend to find it easier to be the driver by initiating, creating, promoting, organising and leading our own programmes or events. Though we should still do this, we need to also value the act of taking our hands off the steering wheel and learning to sit as a passenger, observing what is already happening around us.

It's a concept that often gets overshadowed in our fast-paced, individualistic western society, but I believe it's an important part of hearing the heartbeat of the neighbourhood and it can cause us to step outside of our comfort zone. Being part of something larger than ourselves not only enriches our own lives, empowers others but also helps us to connect authentically within our own neighbourhoods and communities.

### **Embracing Community Development:**

Community isn't just where we live; it's how we live together. Engaging in community development means actively participating in initiatives that improve the well-being of those around us. Whether it's a neighbourhood car boot sale, supporting a local food coop, or joining a local residents group, these activities enable us to build relationships and remind us that we all share a commonality of life.

One community activity I joined this year was a chair yoga group held at Manu Tukutuku our community centre. A lovely Christian woman called Becky runs the class. I laugh to myself sometimes when I think about it, as it isn't the most trendy group to belong to. Most people are elderly, however this group is a vehicle to meet with neighbours in a non-threatening, safe way where our health and well-being is something we share in common. This provides a mutuality and sameness amongst us.



### Faith in Action:

For me, faith is both personal and communal, and it finds its fullest expression in action. Love is the cornerstone of our Christian beliefs, and it calls us to move beyond words into deeds. Community participation is one of the purest ways to live out this faith.

Love in action might look like mentoring a young person, cooking a meal for a neighbour in need, or simply showing up consistently for a cause that matters. These small acts of kindness ripple outward, fostering connection and hope.

Faith isn't just about personal transformation—it's about communal transformation. When we join in, participate with and serve others, we're building relationships. Relationships create the fuel that enable us to travel well together.

### Let's Build Together;

If you're looking for a way to deepen your connection with your community, I encourage you to take a first step. Attend a local meeting, volunteer for an event, or simply reach out to someone who could use a helping hand. Let's continue to build bridges and make our communities places of belonging, support and love.

## Out of Slumber for Seeds of Hope... Written by Pauline Jones



"Healing rain is coming down, bringing mercy to this old town. It's time to lift our heads and return to the mercy seat where time began. Soak this dry heart with healing rain. Only you, the Son of Man, can lift a leper to stand. Lift your hands to be held by the Great I Am." - song by Michael W Smith

After losing my husband four and a half years ago, I was overwhelmed by life's struggles. Then, the song by Michael W. Smith found me, alongside Romans 13:11-12: "It is high time to awake out of sleep, for our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Let us cast off darkness and put on the armour of light." These words opened my heart to God's message. It was time to move forward—not forgetting my husband Larry or our twenty years together but allowing God to transform my grief into good for the future.

A vision emerged like a seed in prepared soil, needing sun and water for growth—a fresh start. Driven by a passion to help those in need, I decided to create vegetable gardens for the Randwick Park community. I built nine garden boxes on my front lawn, filling them with thriving vegetables. These gardens became symbols of nourishment and hope, aiming to unite the community through collaboration, skill-sharing, and mutual support. By lightening each other's burdens, this initiative provided fresh produce and inspired others to cultivate their own gardens.

With the support of the community, including UNOH, youth, the Salvation Army, myself, and my two young adults, the gardens flourished. Generous contributions of seeds, plants, tools, books, fertilisers, and a wheelbarrow came pouring in. Angela Dalton, an Auckland councillor, organised Bunnings to provide 100 bags of sheep and chicken pellets and compost for free. God continued to provide as CityCare constructed two massive vegetable boxes, with more on the way, encouraging others to grow their own food.

Inspired by the success of my garden boxes, I helped several other women start their own vegetable gardens. This effort not only supplied fresh produce

but also fostered a sense of community and empowerment among us. By sharing resources and knowledge, we strengthened our bonds and created a sustainable network of support, demonstrating the power of unity and collaboration.

Another opportunity arose for a Pātaka Kai outside my fence. The community provides food, canned goods, two bread runs, and vegetables regularly. Ideally, no one goes hungry, and food is shared with all in need. My heart saddened when a high school student ate spaghetti straight from a can, but God's love extends to clothing, furniture, and beyond. Through this journey, I've come out of my slumber, sowing seeds of God's love, connecting with people from all walks of life.

I've become part of UNOH, Urban Neighbours of Hope, helping change communities for the better. I embrace the teachings of "Intensional: A Way Forward for the Church" by Justin Duckworth and Alan Jamieson, reminding me that God offers new opportunities for renewal in times of crisis. This is what it means to be the church today, transforming within our communities for Jesus.

*Pauline has been friends of UNOH for many years. In 2024 she decided to become a UNOH Apprentice, where she joins the team in rhythms of shared dinners, prayers and projects.*

# Love Shown in Ordinary Ways...

Written by Anna Mailau

A few months ago, I faced a challenge that stretched me in ways I never anticipated. Kelly, a dear friend and fellow coordinator at Mainly Music, was plunged into a devastating crisis. Her youngest child, just six months old, was grappling with severe health issues, including heart complications that occasionally caused her to stop breathing. For six harrowing months, Kelly stayed in the hospital, clinging to hope through countless challenges.

When I heard the news, I knew I had to act. Without hesitation, I reached out to Kelly, offering whatever help I could. Together with Nadine, a neighbour, we created a plan to care for Kelly's older daughter after school. I took her in three days a week, and Nadine covered the rest. It was a simple act, but it gave Kelly a sense of stability and peace during a chaotic time.

Our home group—friends and neighbours who had become like family—quickly mobilised to support Kelly's family. We organised a meal roster, delivering fresh, home-cooked meals to the hospital week after week. The outpouring of generosity was immediate and heartfelt, as everyone wanted to help in some way. But as time went on and life inevitably pulled some back into their own routines, a smaller group of us remained, committed to walking this journey with Kelly for the long haul.

Through this experience, I witnessed the incredible power of community and the beauty of steadfast compassion. Kelly's partner, initially wary of the support, began to see that our kindness had no strings attached—no hidden motives or expectations—just genuine care.

Over time, Kelly's child grew stronger, and the gratitude in Kelly's heart was profound. Her partner, once skeptical, came to trust and appreciate the enduring support they had received. Our collective efforts not only helped Kelly's family through a crisis but also deepened the bonds that hold our neighbourhood and community together.

Looking back, I'm reminded of how love can transform lives. In the quiet streets of Wainuiomata, the spirit of solidarity continues to shine. This experience is a testament to the lasting impact of a committed group of people—offering hope, building connection, and leaving a legacy of compassion that endures.



## Deep Roots: searching out beauty in brokenness

Written by Elise Fletcher (from the slums in Bangkok)

All great stories hinge on turning points - those moments where everything changes, when character is tested and truth is revealed. Often we don't see these turning points coming and yet they draw all the loose threads of a story together! At Christmas we celebrate the point in history where everything changed, including our understanding of God. When Christ became flesh, he entered into the poverty of our human existence and showed us the sacred ground within it. He committed deeply to one place and time, confounding all expectations of a King with his radical humility. He favoured the poor and the weak; heard the cry of the oppressed and challenged the oppressors. His localised ministry had universal and eternal impact!

For those of us in UNOH, Incarnation is the doctrine that most shapes our approach to mission. We've learnt that community transformation is slow work, requiring us to put down deep roots and search out beauty in brokenness. UNOH is at a turning point. In October we gathered in Melbourne to celebrate 30 years of grassroots ministry amongst the urban poor. We also farewelled The Coath family, the last UNOH workers to be based in Melbourne. This was significant since Melbourne has acted as a hub for UNOH over the years - our organisation was born out of Australia but no longer operates within Australia! If you've followed our story or walked with us, you'll know that UNOH grew rapidly for a time and planted teams in Thailand and New Zealand.

These small teams are alive and well, living out the UNOH way of life with authenticity in very different contexts! By decentralising our structure, new branches are given opportunity to grow. We are full of expectancy for the next chapter of our story! We're not worried by a change of size or pace, by apparent ordinariness or simplicity... because Jesus wasn't! May the God who chose the stable, fill you with joy, hope and compassion this Christmas time.

