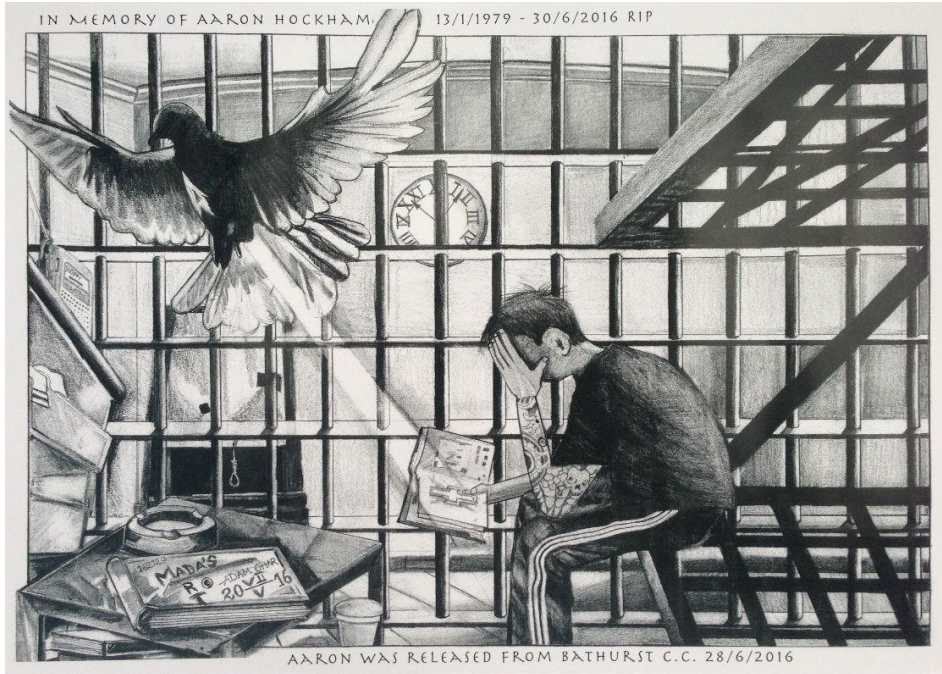


THE BRIDGE COMMUNITY BATHURST *A space to find voice and direction*



# News from The Bridge

## December 2016

PORTRAIT OF AARON, OUR FIRST COMMUNITY MEMBER, BY CURRENT COMMUNITY MEMBER ADAM

Welcome to this update on The Bridge Community. We finish 2016 with a fledgling community and some stories to share...

Adam was released from Bathurst gaol in October. One day during his first week out, Adam saw one of the goal warders in the local supermarket. "Hello chief," Adam said. The warder's face changed, hardened. "What are you doing here?" "I'm trying to stay out of trouble and go straight chief," said Adam. "I can't see that happening", the warder said, "I'll see you back inside", and with that he walked away.

This is just one challenge that Adam has faced since leaving prison. He could have said something nasty to that warder but he chose to say nothing and walk away. Every day there are these small challenges to be faced, talked about, worked through.

Adam had gone into the supermarket to buy some milk. He came out having spent \$160. It was the first time in over a decade that he had been shopping. We later talked about the need for a list of items to buy and how easy it is to spend money.

### A community forms

Since our last newsletter in March we have had six people come to live in the Community.

Our first member, Aaron, didn't make it into the house. Steve met him when he came out of prison and drove him to the Wollongong address listed on his parole papers. Aaron was to come to The Rectory after sorting out his accommodation with parole. On arrival we discovered that the house in Wollongong was trashed and uninhabitable. We eventually checked Aaron in to a motel; not easy when the only ID you have is your prison release papers.

Steve, Aaron and his childhood girlfriend, Erin, shared a meal in the motel restaurant before Steve returned to Bathurst. It was Aaron's first meal in a restaurant. When they

held hands and prayed before the meal, Aaron spontaneously prayed for those who had trashed his house. He ordered prawns and avocado and savoured them, eating slowly.

Two days later Steve had a call from the police: Aaron had been found in his motel bed, dead, an overdose, most likely unintentional.

We honour Aaron as our first resident; our meal was an agape meal, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Russell came to live at The Rectory six weeks ago. It wasn't long before he adopted Smokey, a sweet grey, blue-eyed kitten given to him by his friend Robyn. Smokey claws her way right up Russell's six foot frame to sit on his shoulder. Russell stoically bears the pricks of needle-sharp claws for his little friend.



Andrew came with Adam and left one day later. It was an impulse decision and he texted us some time later to say he was in Sydney and clean. We keep him in our thoughts and prayers.

In the last week we have had two more people join us. Karl is a young man from Norfolk Island who has just had "the longest three months of my life" in Bathurst gaol. Aaron (a different Aaron) has also come as a guest until he finds permanent accommodation. The other community members have been glad to be able to offer Aaron hospitality and a reprieve from the pressures of homelessness.

Like all of us, these men have deep wounds and also wonderful gifts that surprise and delight us – Russell's gift for poetry and his affinity with nature, Adam's flair for home-making, Aaron's resilience and resourcefulness, Karl's winsome country simplicity. Their faith also teaches and inspires us.

It has been a daily roller coaster for them, and for us and we walk with them through the many challenges of adjusting to life outside gaol... teeth, eyes and bodies that need

medical attention from years of neglect and abuse, re-entering and navigating 'the system', learning how to relate to women, learning how to structure your day.

We now have a second house, 'Pat's Place', around the corner from The Rectory. Adam lives there and has been setting it up, ready for others to come and join him. The house has been named in honour of the late Sr Pat Linanne sm, whose spirit and heart for the marginalised continues to inspire us.



On the first weekend in December we held the initial gathering of our advisory board, starting with Friday night dinner with the Community. We have also had meetings with the Jesuit Province to establish the legal structure for The Bridge Community.

We are grateful for the many people who have walked with us in these early months. We have never been more aware of the need for and power of prayer. And as every day passes, we are more and more grateful for those who come to stay with us. They are the heart of our Community.



Photos: Juliet Darling

## The Bridge Community

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### THE BRIDGE COMMUNITY BATHURST

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*(donations to this account are not currently tax deductible)*

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