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**Issue 11
Autumn 2013**

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- From the Coordinator
- A reflection on ToH's Social Gatherings by Ashley
- A reflection on Celebrating Strengths by Dianne

Upcoming Events:

- 27 March—Lewisham Drop In — Come & See
- 12-14 April—Weekend Retreat
- 24 April—Lewisham
- 2 May—Liverpool
- 10 May—Surry Hills
- 22 May—Lewisham
- 14 June—Social Justice Talk by Fr Jim Carty sm

Tree of Hope

The **Tree of Hope** (ToH) is a CatholicCare service which provides emotional and practical support to people living with HIV, their family and their support person. This service is open to people of any faith or no faith.

We are based in Lewisham, with outreach at Surry Hills and Liverpool. The ToH is a place of hospitality and welcome. It offers a space for reflection, support and friendship.



From the Coordinator...

A lot of things have taken place since our last newsletter and the 2012 World AIDS Day Ceremony. Just to recap:

- The relocation from Surry Hills to Lewisham took place and went really well. Everyone who has visited has really liked our new gathering space!
- We have already held social gatherings in our new locations of Liverpool, Surry Hills and Lewisham. Inside you will find wonderfully written articles by Ashley Mason and Dianne Nyoni highlighting these events.
- We've filled all the places for the Weekend Retreat to be held in April.

That's a pretty good start to the year!

We hope that you will be able to join us on Wednesday 27 March from 11am—2pm to **Come and See** the new premises. The tree that was commemorated at last year's World AIDS Day Ceremony will be planted in the garden on this day.



While ToH has these regular social gatherings in a few areas of Sydney, **individual support** is also provided. Please call Marg on 9509 1240 to find out how you can connect with the Tree of Hope Service.

*Warm regards
Marg*

NEW ADDRESS:

2C West St (Cnr Thomas St)
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Autumnal Greetings to all as we bid farewell to another summer of extremes, and transition towards the colder months ahead. As we embrace the change of season, so too have we embraced a year of change for Tree of Hope (ToH). Change can be daunting but it can also be good, and it's been great being a part of social gatherings held so far – from Liverpool to Surry Hills to Lewisham.

On a hot summer's eve, the first of our get togethers was held at the Liverpool Catholic Centre on 24th January. As I sat on the train from the city, memories of the numerous times I had taken this route during childhood to the South Highlands had me in a nostalgic and eager mood. A short 5 minute walk from the station and there was my ToH tribe – in a large, humble demountable – yet rich in human spirit. There were 17 people gathered, including Margaret of course, and the lovely Penny (support worker), who we all had the pleasure of getting to know. An evening of great connection with friends supplemented by a plentiful, healthy supper and soulful, ambient music ensued. We had an especially fun train ride back to the city, with lots of bonvivre, banter and hilarity – the rest of the carriage was left in no doubt as to the great night we had shared together.



Surry Hills

Then on the 8th February we had our first social gathering at our new venue – a community hall in Surry Hills, on another hot and humid summer night! The grand old hall provided a warm and safe setting for this communion of 16 people, including Margaret and the vivacious Merrienne. It was great to meet new

people and enjoy another bounteous supper, having the opportunity to share our hopes and experiences, and to enhance our social networks. And of course have fun.

On the 27th February we gathered at Lewisham ToH for Drop-In time. Though I travelled by car, my fellow attendees said they found it



Lewisham

easy to get to by bus and train, and a short 5 minute walk. ToH is now situated in a beautiful old building with aesthetic gardens and a park opposite. (I think that park is enticing us for a picnic one day in the future.) We chatted and lounged round-table style in the comfort of the open meeting space, with ample natural light spilling in from the bay windows. Again we enjoyed another healthy lunch with scrumptious carrot cake, home made by a fellow member.

The best part of these outings for me has been; developing friendships, sharing my fellow travellers' journeys, embracing change and feeling part of my diverse HIV community. We get to share our strengths and frailties, our hopes and 'let downs' with honesty, respect and fairness. We all have a voice! The group morale is always high and I would like to thank Margaret and fellow workers Penny and Merrienne for organising and facilitating these precious times together in unity, peace and hope.

As the night air chills, the leaves begin to fall and the constant change in our life cycle continues; hope springs eternal.

Written by Ashley Mason

Change can be daunting but it can also be good....

CELEBRATING STRENGTHS WORKSHOP @ SURRY HILLS

Facilitated by Merrienne Sinclair

This was my first event attending the Surry Hills workshop, I was excited when I realised the topic was Celebrating Strength. Often we get caught up in our lives and at times may feel down dealing daily with HIV, I was keen to focus on a positive part of me!

It was a welcoming night of warmth and new friendships I had made and new faces I met on the night. There is something comforting to be with what I now claim as my HIV brothers and sisters. It is encouraging to be among people who understand and have travelled a similar journey to mine. The group is a place where gratitude is felt, friendships are formed, safely and without judgement.



Merrienne

Merrienne and Margaret are welcoming and endearing to say the least. Socially we laughed and enjoyed food and company. The men in the group are true gentlemen welcoming the women, which as it happened to be International Women's Day was a lovely way to celebrate being a woman.

We discovered, as we explored identifying our strengths, that we are from a society where self-praise is not encouraged at least not for those of us before generation Y. I had not thought of that

before, but realised that we have parented our younger generation to be comfortable with positive self-affirmation. With guidance from Merrienne we were able to define what strengths are and these include people's intellectual, physical and interpersonal skills, capacities, interests and motivations.

When thinking about our strengths we cannot forget our friends, family, neighbours, colleagues, as well as information we may have that can contribute and be part of our strengths. I think recognising our dreams, aspirations and interests make us realise we have so much to give, to do and be a part of, that it eases the idea we are alone in our journeys. Being diagnosed with HIV came with losses and came with change, but I realised those changes push us further to explore and develop a new part of ourselves.

I now have a new family of friends; I have engaged in exploring being a storyteller in public speaking and learned how much I enjoy engaging with and encouraging others. With change comes opportunity, change can open doors and grow us into stronger, empathetic people with genuine love and appreciation for life and friendships.



Dianne

I am excited to meet again with my new brothers and sisters at Tree of Hope Surry Hills and look forward to the wonderful bonds that can strengthen us all.

Written by Dianne Nyoni

COME AND SEE

Our March Drop-In Time is an open invitation to all. You are welcome to join us on

Wednesday 27 March, 11 am — 2 pm

Light Refreshments will be served

The tree commemorated at the World AIDS Day Ceremony will be planted.

Please RSVP 9509 1240 / treeofhope@catholiccare.org



It only seems to us that we are different from each other. So a flower on a tree may think that it is a separate being, but all the flowers are parts of the blossoming of one apple tree, and they all come from one seed.

- Tolstoy

If you would like to share a quote in this corner, please email it to treeofhope@catholiccare.org

Please advise if you would like to be anonymous or named

Up Coming Events

SURRY HILLS

2nd Friday of the month
from 6-9pm

Not April—due to weekend
retreat

10 May—Social Gathering

14 June—Social Justice Talk
with Fr Jim Carty sm

LIVERPOOL

SOCIAL GATHERING

Thursday **2 May** 6-9pm

(Close to station and Westfield—
parking available on site)

DROP IN TIME

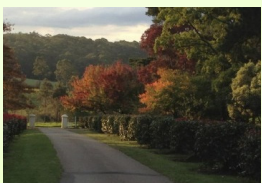
LEWISHAM, 2C West St

**4th Wednesday of the
month 11am—2pm**

27 March

24 April

22 May



**ANNUAL
WEEKEND
RETREAT AT
MITTAGONG**

12-14 APRIL 2013

PLACES HAVE FILLED

Please call Marg on **9509 1240** to RSVP or for more
information including the address for these venues