

MEDIA RELEASE

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From the high life to the high drama of homelessness

For proof that homelessness can befall anyone, you need not look past the cast list of The Mercy Arms Players, a theatre group comprising clients of Catholic Healthcare's Homeless and Housing Support Services.

With its actors – including a past lawyer, University lecturer, teacher and veterinarian – all having experienced homelessness, The Mercy Arms Players encapsulates the theme of next week's National Homeless Person's Week: "It's Not Who You Think."

Based at Catholic Healthcare's Community Connections Day Centre in Waterloo, The Mercy Arms Players are raising awareness during National Homeless Person's Weeks (4-10 August) by raising the curtain on two homeless-themed theatrical performances during the week.

The two 20-minute performances will be held at 'Matavai' (Department of Housing), 3 Phillip Street, Waterloo on Tuesday 5 and Thursday 7 August 2008. Both performances start at 2pm.

Catholic Healthcare is the largest Catholic provider of residential and community aged services in Australia. Catholic Healthcare's Community Services works with in excess of 5,000 clients, including people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

According to Catholic Healthcare's Homeless and Housing Support Services Service Manager Susan McDermott, both the performers and the performances of The Mercy Arms Players highlighted that no one in the community is immune to the risk of experiencing homelessness.

"Our clients come from all walks of life: some have at one time been successful professionals, while others have never had an easy life," Ms McDermott said.

"All the actors of The Mercy Arms Players are clients of our Community Connections Day Centre, most of whom have or are currently experiencing homelessness. Here, they regain a sense of social connectedness, building relationships with people who share common losses, common experiences."

Herbert finds home with heart at Catholic Healthcare's Homeless and Housing Support Services

Even a former anti-apartheid movement member from South Africa has found common ground with Sydney's homeless at Catholic Healthcare Homeless and Housing Support Services – as well as a place to home.

Seventy-six-year-old Herbert, a former humanities teacher and revolutionary poet in South Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, fled to Australia in the early 1970s.

Herbert said other than not being pursued by apartheid authorities, his life in Australia largely mirrored his years in South Africa: in and out of both good jobs and secure accommodation, regularly sleeping in hostels, boarding houses and at times, even cardboard boxes.

“When you become homeless, you honestly don't know what is going on. Everything falls apart and you can't see the ways you can get yourself out of it.”

In 2006, Herbert was referred to Catholic Healthcare's Community Services, who helped him secure long-term accommodation and introduced him to the Community Connections Day Centre. As a key member of The Mercy Arms Players, Hebert finds it both cathartic and inspirational to enact the journeys out of homelessness experienced by himself and other members of the theatre group.

“These are important stories to tell – and to hear,” Herbert said. “Sometimes we all need to go a bit outside of our comfort zones to understand homelessness better and to find the best ways of dealing with it.”

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For further information or to arrange interviews/photographs, contact:

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About Catholic Healthcare's Community Services

Catholic Healthcare's Community Services works with a diverse range of people and communities to enable and maintain sustainable and vibrant lives. With a client base in excess of 5,000 people, Community Services works with the elderly, financially disadvantaged, people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, people with a disability, people with a mental illness, carers and children and young people with special needs or who are at risk of harm.