

Thread Together: transforming lives, one piece of clothing and conversation at a time

Thread Together is a global first, dedicated to taking excess new clothing from manufacturers and designers and redistributing it to vulnerable people within the community at no cost to the recipient. The mobile wardrobe van, sponsored by Bendon Lingerie, is facilitated and run by Anglicare Southern Queensland and St Andrew's, Indooroopilly.

In this case study, four big-hearted women from the St Andrew's, Indooroopilly community share about what drew them to volunteer for the innovative Thread Together initiative and the highlights and learnings from their volunteer journey so far.

Allana Wales – St Andrew's, Indooroopilly Thread Together volunteer

It is impossible to delineate where the 'Church' ends and our human, daily and communal lives begin, and vice versa. Upon my enthusiastic retelling of the sorts of tasks Thread Together volunteers undertake (such as sorting, packing, folding, crate-stacking, box-crunching, recycling, hanging, stocking and driving), a friend remarked to me, "Oh, so you are helping people in need?" It struck me, suddenly, that of course we were. Of course we are because the person in need is me. I am the one who has come away with the gift of listening to a young guest who visited the Thread Together van at one of our return meets. He had met someone nice and shared in conversation, with his new clothes giving his own dignity a boost. Often our privilege is born of having been present for, and listening to, an unexpected narrative.

There are concentric circles of community inherent in a venture such as this. When volunteers are in the church undercroft or the garage sorting or packing clothes, we have the benefit of truly invaluable time with friends who are either connected to or who attend the parish. When we drive the van out for a Thread Together site visit, we meet volunteers from other organisations (both secular and ecumenical) and we enjoy showing how the van is fitted out. Often this is a springboard for more conversation and recommendations for other potential sites to visit. The flow of enrichment across our communities is manifold.

The remarkable partnering of Thread Together, Anglicare Southern Queensland and St Andrew's, Indooroopilly, together with The Rev'd Sue Grimmett's vision, has given ground for the gentle transformation of lives for the better. I look forward to seeing how this partnership will continue to nurture ourselves and others – volunteers, guests and patrons alike – in this active movement of dignity where everybody wins.

PARTNERSHIPS

In a parish setting, a partnership is where a church collaborates with one or several other organisations to:

- provide a service
- organise/lobby around an issue
- run a key event (e.g. a Q&A panel)
- implement other activities.



Susan Gill – St Andrew’s Church, Indooroopilly Thread Together volunteer

I was drawn to volunteer with Thread Together for the following two reasons. The first, caring for people in our communities, and the second, caring for our planet. Supporting people who are experiencing hardship in their lives by utilising clothes that would otherwise go to landfill achieves both goals. In my time in the program I have observed the impact that receiving new clothes has made in people’s lives.

An example of this from one of our sites is a young woman who had only the clothes she wore, as she had recently fled a domestic violence situation. The look of joy on her face as she looked through the van and chose a range of clothes that were new and suited her style was deeply rewarding. Her gratitude was enormous and it was both a joy and delight to watch her move from sadness as she told me her story of fleeing to feelings of hope that there were people who could help her reclaim her life.

The part that Thread Together plays in providing this hope is significant. My key learning in that the dignity in being able to have access to new clothes at a time when little else in life is working is critical. Without access to critical life needs, people lose hope. They feel different from their peers, isolated and sometimes even ostracised.

Christian organisations working together in partnership bring this hope and, with it, the possibility of a new and different life to those in need. Christian beliefs are demonstrated in a kind, supportive and practical way. I love that Thread Together is a vital part of providing hope in the community. The additional bonus is the friendship and camaraderie I have gained from my fellow volunteers.

Shubhra Srivastava – St Andrew’s Church, Indooroopilly Thread Together volunteer

Projects like Thread Together represent Christianity in action. The partnership between Anglicare, an organisation which has the networks to identify those in need of assistance, and the Parish community which represents the ‘grassroots’ of the Christian Church, is a natural fit. Organisations can provide the resources to assist these projects, but ultimately people working together to support each other are what builds a better and more caring community.

St Andrew’s Indooroopilly Thread Together volunteer, Shubhra Srivastava, believes that everyone has a right to live with self-respect and dignity in the world. Far from my hometown in Lucknow, India, I came to Brisbane, Australia to live. I have seen people here with the same emotions and feelings as in India. We can see on the ground why Australia is called a multicultural country, and that we are all fundamentally the same.



I have always wanted to serve people who are in real need. Fortunately, I met Tim (the Parish Administrator at St Andrew's, Indooroopilly) on one occasion at the church, where he explained to me about this wonderful Anglicare project, 'Thread Together', which assists vulnerable people in the community. One of the best things about volunteering for this project is seeing the smiles on the faces of people who are receiving new clothing. This gives me an inner happiness which I can't buy. Being there to listen to someone telling their life story about so many hurdles and pains teaches me about dealing with difficult situations. Also, I believe that what we are doing with Thread Together is a moral reflection of what it means to be a true Australian.

Through volunteering for this project, I have learned so many things. One of the things I value most is being able to serve people from different communities, cultures and backgrounds. Through Thread Together, clothing is diverted from landfill and people are respectfully clothed, and this is making a meaningful contribution to society. Special thanks to Kate Littmann-Kelly, Anglicare's Thread Together Volunteer Coordinator, for her continuous support and assistance.

Benefits of partnerships

- Helps parishes to more effectively love our neighbour.
- Helps shift misconceptions re the Church being 'insular'.
- Contributes to growing healthier and more connected communities.
- Broadens a parish's community network for future endeavours.
- Leaders and parish volunteers learn new skills and knowledge.
- Significantly increases chances of getting approval on grant applications (especially government grants).
- Increases pool of resources (e.g. re time, hands/feet, finance, venue options, equipment).
- Increases 'news worthiness' of initiative.
- More opportunities to be Christ to others.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- From reading the case study, what do you think has contributed to the Thread Together partnerships being strong and effective?
- What insights do you glean from the viewpoints shared by the four Thread Together volunteers?

MORE INFORMATION

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