

SELWYN DAY CENTRE @ ST MARKS ANGLICAN CHURCH, SWANSON

The background:

The Selwyn Day Centre at St Marks started in 2004

With funding from the Selwyn Foundation, encouragement from a retired priest and the efforts of a volunteer builder, the small congregation worked hard at getting the church hall "guest-worthy." And within a short time, the dilapidated hall was wonderfully transformed.

Today there is on average 25+ attendees each week. These are mostly from the community – who began as reluctant first-timers but turned committed Selwyn "Groupies" that looked forward to Fridays - come hail or shine!

The Group has become a hive of activity and has definitely filled a niche in the community. It offers a programme of sit down exercises, morning teas, games and socials every Friday from 10-12noon. Guest speakers, day trips, and other social events are also part of the mix. Attendees (strangers to begin with) have formed close friendships – often socialising and looking out for each other even outside group times.

Benefits & Impact:

For the Community: Especially for the elderly who are living alone, there is a lot of sharing of information at the Group. This often reduces the fear of the unknown and helps them feel connected to the community.

For the attendees: The Group is very much a social hub – it is a place where they can come together, feel accepted and informed. There is sense that many have come out of themselves and blossomed. The sit down exercises and games are fun and enhance flexibility / mobility.

For the workers: Leadership and team working skills are being developed (a big factor for the group's success). Another development has been the sense of being fruitful in Ministry (they consider the work as unto God). The workers enjoy what they do and freely volunteer their time. The buzz and energy of the team is most apparent.

For the Church: The effort expended has been greatly exceeded by the benefits reaped! Mainly:

- **Connectedness to the community:** Through the attendees, we have come to know their families, the local doctors and businesses as well as other community leaders who are highly supportive of the Group's efforts. It has definitely lifted St Marks' profile in Swanson.
- **Gains:** Last year we received a grant from a local trust for a concrete path and heat-pump for the Church Hall – one of the reasons for receiving the grant was the Group's use of the hall. Furthermore, the Group has, over time, purchased tables, chairs and other resources (from money accumulated through weekly donations) and that has benefitted the Church as well.
- **Establishing new Church members:** New comers to the Church have been greatly helped in the settling-in process by joining the Selwyn Group – especially those new to the district.
- **Outreach:** Finally, this Group has been a wonderful avenue for outreach. Prayer has become a regular feature and has increased the spiritual awareness of attendees. The love and care of the Group, particularly by the Christians has created an openness towards Church and Christianity. Out of the Group, an Alpha Group was formed which then grew into a fortnightly Bible Study that is going strong. We are also seeing more coming to church on a regular basis. Other members of the church not directly involved with the Group have relished opportunities to indirectly part take of this ministry by way of prayer, being guest speakers, involvement with special events etc.

In summary, the Selwyn Day Centre has been a real blessing to many - especially St Marks. When the group started, the motivation stemmed from the desire to help older members of the community. But we did not anticipate such returns and are constantly surprised by it. (Isn't it just like God to always give exceedingly abundantly above what we ask!)

NB: Of special importance is the fact that Selwyn Day Centres have great potential to reconnect the older members of the community back to church / God. In an age where churches are mostly youth focussed, outreaches to the elderly are often secondary or forgotten. We highly recommend that churches seriously consider the opportunity to

use Selwyn Day Centres to build bridges for the elderly to reconnect with Church / God. Often, the elderly are reluctant to listen to new expressions of Christianity and can be suspicious of younger folk selling them new ideas and concepts. However, we have observed that many will take note when a peer/ peers share their testimony or offers of prayer.

Celina & Martin Prokopetz
Pastors in Charge: St Marks Anglican Church, Swanson

This church is in a small rural town and is a 'daughter' church of a larger suburban church.