

Homelessness_Hana Ananda

Bron: My husband Gregg and I met when we both joined a live-in community in Melbourne's inner city. It was based at a city church, and with 10 or so others we opened the doors every day to share lunch with whoever wanted to come.

Carol: Welcome. I'm Carol and You're with Women of Hope. Today we have Bron with us to tell us about her work with homeless people.

Tammy's here too of course.

Tammy: Hi there, it's good to be with you again. And welcome Bron.

Bron: Thank you.

Tammy: So how did people know you were offering lunch?

Bron: The word got around and soon we had people coming who were homeless, or who were living in lonely nearby boarding houses. By far, most of them were middle-aged men. It was great sharing lunch with them, and after weeks...and months, some real friendships sprang up between them and us.

Carol: Bron, why were middle-aged men homeless? I thought it would be mostly young people.

Bron: Well, let me tell you about a few of them. Their stories were often very surprising...and heartbreaking. One man used to be a lecturer at university, but after a break-up with his wife he fell into deep depression and wasn't able to keep teaching. So he'd lost his home as well as his family and had ended up in a boarding house as he tried to get his life back together...alone. Another guy had lost his own business because of the very same thing. These were incredibly intelligent, hard-working guys, who'd come up against a major crisis or loss in life, and were paying dearly for it. Not only had they lost their families, their homes & their work, they'd also lost their confidence and dignity...which just made it even harder to recover and get back on their feet again.

Tammy: Were they all like this?

Bron: No. There were other guys who hadn't worked a day in their lives. They had often come from incredibly troubled families, or they'd never had a family, and had suffered really traumatic abuse and neglect. Their lives were a sad and difficult game of survival. When everything seemed

to be against them, and there were absolutely no supports in life for them; when they mattered to no one, it would almost take a superhuman effort to stop the vicious cycle their lives had become. How do you survive without work? And how do you get work when you stink because you can't remember when you last showered? How would your job pay you, how would you get a bank account, if you don't have a fixed address? A lot of them couldn't even get government pensions because they had no home address. And who's going to employ someone who's been out of work for a long time and has lost their confidence...and is behind in their skills? ...And on it goes.

Tammy: How very difficult for them. So who else came to have lunch with you?

Bron: They were not all middle-aged men. There were a few women, and even the occasional teenager or child.

There's one day that really sticks in our minds...

It was about half an hour into lunch, when we noticed a young girl with blonde hair walk in...head down, really quiet, almost a bit afraid. Funny thing was, she didn't even head to the table for food, but instead she walked to the back of the room where there was a couch...lay down...and promptly fell asleep!

Lunch kept going on around her...and it was noisy! ...About 30 men enjoying some robust conversation, the clatter of dishes, someone even started playing the piano!...and still she slept. People finished their meal, cleaned up the table and washed the dishes...and she still slept. Everyone left, except Gregg and me and a friend Julie, who just waited.

When she woke up and saw an empty room except for us, she was terrified and bolted out the door! Poor thing, she couldn't have been more than 15 years old. Obviously, we were really worried for her...the streets are no place for a young girl...so Julie and I decided to go for a walk and see if we could find her. We didn't want to frighten her by stalking her, but knew if we took a bit of a look around the 'hot spots' where people went when they had nowhere else to go...we knew we'd probably find her.

And we did.

Carol: Oh good. So what happened then?

Bron: She was happy for us to stop and chat, now that we were out in the open, and we learned that she'd just run away from home a couple of days before, and had been sleeping in a city park (well, trying to sleep...she was terrified of the rats!). She said her name was Becky. As we spoke we could tell that she was really wanting to talk, but was really cautious and holding back because she had no idea who we were and whether we were going to bring her more trouble.

After a while we said goodbye but invited her to come back for some lunch the next day. And she came! And the next day she came...and the next...

Personally, I'm sure that the day Becky and I met each other was just one of those things that was meant to be. We became very close very quickly. For some reason she decided we were safe to trust, and as we got to know each other more over time, she told us why she'd run from home.

Tammy: We're together on Women of Hope and Bron is here telling us about her experience of reaching out to those who are homeless.

So Bron, tell us why *had* Becky run away from home?

Bron: What she told us was very sad. Her dad had sexually abused her since she was about 4. And although her mum was a really nice lady, she'd refused to believe Becky when she told her about it. Nobody believed her. She'd wanted to escape for so long, but what would happen to her if she left?? Besides, she was hoping that if she stayed, her dad would *only hurt her* and not her younger sister.

But in the end it became too much, and she ran for it...after 11 years of abuse. She'd never been allowed to just 'be a kid'...her whole childhood had been filled with betrayal, pain and fear. She couldn't have been more alone. And if she couldn't trust her own parents, then who could she ever trust? Her experience of abuse had become part of who she was, and had messed with every part of her life. Her schooling had suffered, her friendships had suffered, and the level of fear and loss she'd experienced would affect her mental health for years, maybe her whole life. She toyed with the idea of suicide, of ending the pain. She started to use heroin just so she could forget about life for a few blissful moments.

And just like that, she'd become the "Drug-Addicted Mentally-Ill Problem Youth" that police and Human Services put on their hot list to capture and place in accommodation.

But Becky had learned to fear anyone in authority (because of her dad) and her days became a game of cat & mouse - dodging the police and social workers who were out to find her and put her in a 'safe place for homeless youth'.

Carol: Did they ever catch her?

Bron: In the end they did catch up with her, but she asked if instead of being put in residential care, she could come and live with us. So she did.

Becky, Gregg and I became a family that day. The great thing is, over the years, she's been able to re-find her own family. Her mum finally acknowledged the abuse that had been going on, and

left Becky's dad. She and her mum had counselling together to rebuild their relationship. And she was reunited with her brother and sister too.

So great stuff has happened over the years. But you know, it will always be an uphill battle for Becky. No-one experiences that type of trauma, that young, for that long, and comes out without many scars. She still carries deep fear and anxiety that affects her mental health very badly at times. But she has her family back, and has her own flat now, and with some support is living a meaningful life with friends and loved ones. She now has hope.

When Becky asked Gregg and me why we reached out to her, we told her it was because God reached out to us. She used to say she hated God, which I couldn't really blame her for. Then she decided she didn't believe in God. These days...well, she's not a regular at her local church, but she's not so sure now that there is *no God*. Maybe that's because she's met Him, in the love we have for her. Because for sure, we've met God in the love she has for us, and in the wonder and strength of the human spirit that we've witnessed in her life.

Tammy: We've been hearing from Bron about how they've shared their food and their home and their lives with people who are homeless.

Carol: I wonder if you know how those people feel – or maybe even how Becky feels? There are so many different reasons why people have no home, aren't there?

And did you hear why Bron and her husband wanted to reach out to help people? ...Yes, because God reached out to them. We want to share a story with you today about another person who helps homeless and poor people...in Indonesia.

Tammy: Her name is Hana Ananda, known in Indonesia as Ibu (ee-boo)Hana – sister Hana. Let me tell you a little of her story.

Hana was born in an ordinary family in Indonesia. At the age of fourteen, she decided to follow the Lord Jesus Christ and committed her life to God. With God's love in her heart, she started helping in youth work.

When she was a university student, aged 17, she was told by the doctors that she had a rare disease that would cause her to be totally paralysed by the age of 25. But while she was helping sick people at her local hospital, God miraculously healed her. So she didn't become paralysed. God had things planned for her to do...to help many people.

She grew up speaking Indonesian. She completed an English degree in an Indonesian university and when she was 28 years old she got married to a man named Harry. Harry was a successful business man who imported kitchen equipment into Indonesia.

Hana helped many people in her local church. She worked with a youth group, she helped with the church choir and with the administration of the church, as well as other things. Hana was a good organiser and leader. For a while she was the leader of an Indonesian Christian women's group, called Women Aglow.

Carol: My, it sounds as though Hana was a very busy woman.

Tammy: She was...and she still is. She lives in Surabaya, in East Java where there are millions of poor people. She reaches out to many of these people with the love of God.

In 1977 Hana saw that lots of people did not have enough food to eat and God spoke to her and said, 'Now feed the people'. So she started helping poor people in Surabaya, (Suŕa- buya) giving them food. She continued until she just didn't have any more food to give. But that was just the beginning of her work of helping poor and sick people.

Hana's husband, Harry began helping her too and in 1991 Hana was able to start a charity foundation, 'Pondok Kasih' (Pondogh Ka-see) which means 'House of Love'.

There were children in Surabaya who had no parents to look after them, so Hana opened an orphanage – a home for them to live in and be looked after. There were also older women in that city who had no-one to look after them, so she opened a home for some of them to live in too. But that wasn't all.

Carol: It already sounds like so much! What else did Hana do?

Tammy: Well, Hana and Harry both became pastors of the church they attended. Up to 2,500 poor people attend this church each week.

They noticed that some pregnant women were being rejected by their families so they provided a place for these women to come and have their babies. They also rented another house for people who needed help to sort out the problems in their lives and have counselling. Harry decided to give his business office as well, to be used for helping people.

Carol: Hana and her husband care for others just like Jesus told us to. But do Hana and the 'House of Love' just help people from her church?

Tammy: Good question, Carol. No. They help people of every religion. As well as providing food, they have set up health clinics in poor neighbourhoods, and set up a community centre where they

provide health and hygiene classes, English classes, computer training and training in trade skills for people in the area. They lend money to poor people to start their own businesses and provide clean drinking water for some communities.

Carol: The Pondok Kasih (Pondogh Ka-see) work has grown a lot since Hana started it in 1991 hasn't it?

Tammy: Yes...there are now more than 80 people working there, including some medical doctors. And Ibu Hana has been, and still is, the leader of this charity. Her love for the poor and the sick shows as she hugs them and helps them in so many ways. The president of Indonesia has presented Hana with three awards for her wonderful work helping others.

Carol: Who pays for all this charity work – it must cost a lot of money?

Tammy: Many people donate money to Hana's 'House of Love' programs. Like Hana, they want to help poor and sick people and give them hope when they don't have hope.

Carol: Bron and her husband, and Hana and her husband show their love for Jesus as they help others. Let me read to you, from God's word, the Bible, what the Lord Jesus Christ said about this.

Jesus was talking to his followers about the coming day of judgement. Then he will come back as King and Judge, and everyone will have to account for their lives. To some people he will say:

“*Welcome...*When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me.”

Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, “When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?”

The Lord will answer, “Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.” (Matthew 25:35-40, CEV)

So Jesus was saying that when we show our love for other people we are showing our love for *him*. When we give food to hungry people, or give people somewhere to stay, or give clothes to people who need them, it's as if we're doing it for *Jesus*.

Tammy: And it's the same for taking care of sick people and visiting people who are in jail. Jesus was really telling us that his followers should do things like this.

Carol: Of course, some of us can't do very much...we may not have enough money to help in big ways like this. But, most of us can do small things that are kind. If we want to love and care for others we're sure to find some ways to help. They don't have to cost us money. Maybe we can visit someone who's lonely, or give a hungry person some food.

Tammy: Bron & Gregg reached out to others because God reached out to them; Ibu Hana & Harry followed what Jesus said to do and used their abilities and their money to help a lot of people. God will be pleased if we do our best to help other people even in small ways.

Carol: My friend, would you like to do what Jesus wants us to do and help other people, maybe in a small way, or maybe in a bigger way, depending on what you can afford and how much time you have to give? You can, you know. You can ask God to show you how you can help others...he *will* show you.

Let's ask God to help us now. You might like to pray this prayer with me:

Dear God, I would like to do kind and helpful things for other people. Please help me to notice things that I can do, and to do them. Help me be a blessing to other people. Amen

Tammy: It's time for us to go now. We would love to hear what you're doing in your community. You can write to us in care of this station or at TWR Women of Hope. The email address is TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org.

That's TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org. If you have missed a program or want to hear one again you can visit our website TWRWomenofHope.org. or visit our Facebook page. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

Goodbye – until next time.

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