

CORPS RESOURCES



ECHUCA CORPS 'ENCOUNTER' STORY

by Rebecca Walker

OVERVIEW

Every Friday night in Echuca the community gathers at the Echuca Corps for a time of fellowship and worship known as 'Encounter'. The evening commences with a shared meal, before the kids head off to their Kid's club, the tweens and teens head to a nearby hall for youth group and the adults gather for a time of prayer and worship.

90% of the 75 people connected to the Encounter congregation did not attend the Sunday morning service at Echuca Corps before Encounter commenced in early 2008. When the congregation started, the intention was to connect with families and provide ministry for everyone in the family at the same time, same location. Despite the plans of Captains Colin and Anne Lane to reach families, God had a different plan! The new congregation has been most effective in connecting with men! A few of these men who had been struggling to maintain hope have found a new lease on life. They have a renewed sense of purpose and belonging in their lives, which they attribute to walking in the doors and attending worship.

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

In order to assess when to conduct Encounter, Captains Colin and Anne Lane conducted a survey to ask people in the community when would be a good time for them to come to church. This survey was conducted through the Salvo Store, and Mainly Music playgroup ministries. This assisted in moving people who were connected to the Army via these ministries into the worshipping community. The results of the survey were that Friday night would be the best time, and so Encounter was set to be a Friday night event. The initial advertising for the event was also done through the Salvo Store and Mainly Music playgroup ministries, through a postcard sized brochure. Most of the attendees have come as a result of word of mouth and through the Emergency Relief program.

MULTIGENERATIONAL MINISTRY - ONE TIME, ONE PLACE

The initial intention when Captains Colin and Anne Lane were planning Encounter was to connect with families, and provide a ministry for each generation at one time and one place. For this reason, the schedule for the evening incorporates a shared meal together, and then there are age-specific ministries that run later in the night for kids and teenagers whilst the adults are at worship. Initially all these ministries ran onsite at the Echuca Corps, however with the growth in attendance, the Youth Ministry component has been moved to another location nearby.

Whilst this ministry to families is functioning very well, the surprise has been that many men have also connected into the Corps via Encounter. Captain Anne Lane reports, "With so many men coming, the women are having a field day. There has even been 3 relationships established



DESIGNING THE SERVICE

through this time, with one couple recently getting engaged (not that we intended it to be a dating service). Our initial target group was families, but God had a different plan and men have felt the desire to come to the Friday night congregation, along with others too. We have had a couple of men come along who were considering taking their own life but found themselves walking in the doors and attending worship and all is well with them."

The service is very low-key and accessible; there is no standing on ceremony. However, in the short time this congregation has been running around 20 people have come to know Christ for the first time. Captain Anne Lane reports, "The worship is awesome and inspiring for us as leaders. We can be preaching and telling the congregation that they can have a relationship with Jesus Christ, and it wouldn't be unusual for somebody to yell out 'tell me how! Or we will talk about a particular issue and somebody will engage in an open conversation with us about it. The best part about this new congregation is that it has

become a lighthouse of prayer. People are genuinely coming for prayer and to pray for others. Our prayer time can often go for 15 minutes or more and we're seeing answers to prayer weekly"

The most exciting thing about Encounter at Echuca Corps is not their methods. It is not the excellence of their worship. It is not the generosity of their hospitality. It is rather that the simple and authentic way they worship attracts the sweet aroma of the presence of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Truth. God is truly at work at Encounter in a beautiful way!



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