

Connections

The latest from Young Life Australia

Autumn 2023



‘Behold, I will do a new thing’ Isaiah 43:19 KJV

INSIDE

The best is yet to come – Page 2
Message from Mark Stretton

Prayer, discipleship and a sharp vision – Page 3
International Ministry: The Balkans

Summer Camp Spotlight – Page 4
From the Camp Director

A year of renewed vision – Page 6
Local area updates

 **YoungLife**
Australia

Message from our Acting CEO

The best is yet to come



Welcome to the Autumn edition of our Connections Newsletter.

Over the last few months we have seen God's faithfulness at work in Young Life. Summer Camp alone was a testament of the great work of this ministry to unreached teenagers, with 73 making decisions to follow Jesus. We also had an outstanding group of volunteers who went above and beyond to serve our campers. I am so grateful!

We have many plans for this year across programs and areas, with much under development, and we are looking forward to continue growing our relationships with our international family. Young Life is truly a global movement with a local heart.

I hope you are encouraged by the stories in the following pages. Please keep us in your prayers. I am certain that 2023 will bring great things and many students will be reached with the love of Jesus in schools and universities throughout Australia...I know that the best is yet to come for Young Life!

Grateful for your support and encouragement,
Mark Stretton
 Acting CEO

Growth in the uni space

University ministry

Macquarie University

Young Life at Macquarie University has kicked off 2023 with "O Week" in February, as we welcomed all new and returning students on campus.

We're starting the new year strong with four new student leaders added to our team and we are dreaming and believing for all God will do this year!

We are praying that we will know more students by name this semester, and that we will see more deep faith conversations with students. Our hope is to see this university campus transformed as we pray together, that we may walk with Him in courage, wisdom, and grace.



Jess Martin
 Area Director – Ryde

University of Wollongong

Hi! My name is Emma and I am the new staff associate at the University of Wollongong in NSW. I'm so keen to be in this role and to be a part of the Young Life team! I have grown up going to camps as a kid and have found the Young Life family and environment to be one full of love, life and fun, always keeping Jesus at the centre. I am so keen for what God has in store for the University of Wollongong community.

Right now we are gathering one-on-one with fellow students to build relationships. Then we will engage some volunteers and in our first meeting we will discuss the values and principles of Young Life and brainstorm on how we can serve and love the UoW community.

This is our pioneering stage, so please join me in praying for volunteers, for the students and the staff.



Emma Stretton
 Staff Associate, UoW

International Ministry: The Balkans

Prayer, discipleship and a sharp vision



Greetings from the Balkans. We are so grateful that God has opened more doors to neighbouring nations!

In November 2022, with 40 participants gathered for a prayer weekend, from Albania, Bulgaria and Macedonia and was held near Skopje in Matka Canyon. It was a special time with staff and volunteers coming together to pray for the Balkan region, especially and for the the vision the Lord has laid on our heart to see teenagers reached.

During the first weekend of February 2023, we held our discipleship retreat in Skopje. This year there were 30 teenagers in attendance, and 4 adult leaders. The theme was "Go Deeper" and it was accomplished through time of solitude and silence, a social media fast, corporate times of worship and prayer and recreation including hikes, games and enjoying fellowship with each other. At the end of the weekend we received some extraordinary feedback from our participants:

"I feel God can use me", "I feel God is with me", "His ways are higher than my ways, and his thoughts are higher than mine"

Our vision for 2023 includes:

- In Macedonia's capital of Skopje, one of our plans is to have 2 clubs – a WyldLife (middle school age) and a Young Life high school club plus an additional bible study group.
- We are also planning to relaunch Capernaum, the ministry to special needs students, and hire a part-time coordinator to spearhead this ministry.
- In Bulgaria, there will be a Winter Weekend Camp that will have in attendance students and leaders from four cities, in addition to a club being brought to another city to showcase the ministry to the local church. We hope to as ministry grows, bring on a Bulgarian country director to lead the ministry.
- In Albania, we are hoping to become locally registered this year and have an Albanian country director. Ministry in the capital of Tirana has launched WyldLife ministry this year and hopes to have their first city camp with this age group.

Please pray for our ministry in Skopje to extend to other cities in Macedonia, as we have our national camp this summer plus our Skopje WyldLife camp; in Tirana we are looking expand to other cities; and in Bulgaria to go beyond Sofia and Pernik to other cities such as Blagoevgrad and Veliko Tarnovo. Also, please pray for Greece, Kosovo and Serbia as doors open there. Please pray for harvesters and investors in the ministry.

Brooke Filipovski
 Regional Director, The Balkans



From the Camp Director Summer Camp Spotlight

As camp director I had the joy of stewarding the team this year. 2023 was a special one as we returned to Jindabyne after bushfires and COVID-19 forced us away from the annual home of Young Life Australia's camps. It was hard-fought and we re-learned lessons from years passed, but I was proud to see a new batch of Young Life staff and volunteers take up the call. In many ways camp can be a wild ocean that volunteers step into, not really knowing what to expect... but through their faith in Jesus and courage to say Yes they make the bold step that means lives are changed forever.

I was reminded of "the parable of the good soil, and how sometimes all four conditions of the soil could be present in one's soul. Summer Camp almost acts as an "excavator or plough", which works in all its parts to turn the campers' heart over and over until it becomes

a place of good soil, ready to receive the good news of Jesus. From the unparalleled service of the Work Crew, to the compassion and care of Cabin Leaders, to the excellence of Summer Staff — every piece plays its part to turn the soil in every camper's soul.

This camp will go down as one of my favourites. And by the end of the week something I had never seen before happened... **73 campers stood up to say that they wanted to begin this journey of faith with Jesus.** That's 90% of the campers, which is almost unheard of for youth camps with unchurched kids in the western world!

God is at work in Young Life and I am convinced that the best is yet to come. All we have to do is keep saying 'Yes' to Jesus.

Ben Hura
Area Director, Sydney



CAMP MOMENTS

"2023 was the largest Summer Camp group that has ever been from the Barossa valley. We are very thankful for the generosity of the local people, churches and business that enabled this to happen."



"Getting the Nationwide Young Life volunteer family back together, reconnecting with old friends and meeting new ones, such a blessing to be part of something bigger than ourselves."



"The sense of achievement the young people shared after conquering Mt Kosciuszko, it's a massive effort, but really does prove they can do anything."



"Hearing students overcome their fears by going over the rockface in abseiling, or on the back of the tube."



“

"Camp changes the lives of volunteers as well – hearing one volunteer say 'this camp has changed things, I feel like I can face challenges now, and know it's going to be ok'"

"The transformation in the camper group from the start to the end, from nervous and restless, to joyful and at peace."



”

"Having young Work Crew participants come back from camp and ask "how can I get involved more with Young Life, this has brought my faith alive again"



"Seeing 32 teenagers from Western Sydney roll into camp and be unsettled by the love of God. Kids from hard worlds, tough backgrounds and complex situations arrived at camp to a grand welcome. They had a resort-level experience and were met by love, service, and generosity from the volunteers. Grace was everything they experienced, and you could tell it was a shock to their system. But the joy of the Young Life camp is that it set the most beautiful platform for almost all of them to stand up and declare that they wanted to follow Jesus!"

Local area updates

A year of renewed vision

Sydney, NSW

Our God is so faithful. That is what 2022 taught me. That is what camp showed me. Our God is faithful. He has a plan and He is committed to seeing his name glorified among the nations. His Holy Spirit is in the world, looking to move upon the work of men and women who will say yes in obedience to what He is up to. Thank you for your faithfulness and partnership in the mission; the fruitfulness we are seeing is due to your faithful yes.

I'm deeply encouraged by the work we did in 2022, out of a couple of tough years we have led strongly launching Young Life in 2 new LGAs of Sydney (Blacktown and Fairfield). This is alongside an already thriving ministry in Parramatta and Ryde. In 2023 I hope we can see Young Life launch in the Cumberland area, in Western Sydney University and in Penrith. I know that God can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine!

Please join with me in praying for the right people to join the mission in the right places at the right times, and also for Jesus to provide for this work financially. This ministry is the best vehicle for introducing young people outside the church to Jesus and I think we need to get to a place where we can engage every kid, everywhere.

Ben Hura
Area Director, Sydney

Barossa Valley, SA

2022 was exciting as we grew in relationships internationally and saw our local areas, staff and volunteers refresh and reset after the pandemic.

I have been reminded that Young Life is the most exciting organisation on the planet, bringing real hope and transformation into the lives of young people in the Barossa, but also across our nation and the globe.

I have a renewed vision, that every school, town and city needs a Young Life area, because every young person deserves the chance to hear about the good news of Jesus from someone that they know and trust.

In 2023 we are looking forward building on the momentum from Camp, getting to know students more, and meeting their friends. We are also excited for new volunteer leaders and expanding our church partnerships.

Over the year we plan to:

- Run a weekly breakfast club and drop-in space at Nuriootpa High School
- Run a weekly breakfast and Club at Faith – Lutheran College Senior Campus
- Run weekly lunchtime games at Faith Junior Campus
- Run Fortnightly Wyld Life meetings – yrs 4–8
- Run a monthly Infusion Youth Service, with band, guest speaker and ice cream.

Sophie Wilksch
Area Director, Barossa Valley

Hobart, TAS

The 2022 Hobart Spring Camp was similar in structure to Summer Camp, with adventure activities during the day, Club at night with music, games and a talk.

With 40 teenagers in attendance, and an incredible response to the good news of the Gospel, with the majority of participants responding and wanting belong to something bigger than themselves... We are more energised than ever to continue the work at hand in our local area!

One of the many special moments for one of our staff members was 'Cabin Time', which is the "15 to 20 minutes after Club where we split off into our small groups and get a chance to hear where the teens are at. It's such a privilege to be allowed a glimpse into their lives and struggles, but also to get a chance to share hope and faith with them!"

As we step into 2023 we have several activities planned for the year ahead:

The 'Pancakes in schools' outreach at Emmanuel Christian School and Bayview Secondary College with pending confirmation from a third school. Altogether we can reach up to 500 teenagers!

We will be starting the "Strength and Shine" program in term 2 at Emmanuel Christian School and an Alpha course with leaders during term 1, with view to run it with students in term 2.

Back row: Simon Brown,* Bryce Smith, Anthony Marconi, Nathan Wardle*, Alinda MacDonal, Alex Leary, Woody Newton-brown, Georgia Tilley*, Katie Ellis*, Ben Hura

Front row: Georgia MacMahon, Sophie Wilksch, Lily Jordan*, Nicola Moore*, Will Byard* Absent Alison Wilcox.*

*Hobart team members.



Chaplaincy

God is at work

G'day! Chappy Sage here, I am the new Chaplain at my old state high school in Brisbane, appointed in September 2022.

Chaplaincy in our school sees me working in the mental/emotional support Hub, where I mainly provide pastoral care for students struggling with school, home and life. This involves a lot of 1-on-1 sessions and running development programs both internally and through external providers. My background is in acting and music, so I'm also involved in the school's Performing Arts programs, where I get to connect with students in what they love doing.

In this short time I've had local church youth ministries and the Lions Club reach out wanting to hear about and support our Chaplaincy program.

There are also other opportunities where we hope to see local faith-filled individuals come in and show Jesus' love to teenagers. The school has –by God's grace–been extremely open and supportive of the assistance being offered by local churches.

My main desire is to see teens meeting Jesus, both through the volunteers who walk through our gates, and through the connection they have with Young Life.

Recently I had a senior student come for a chat. Last year, she told me that she comes from a nominal mixed-faith household. She said that lately, she has found herself listening to Christian music and filling her Pinterest with Bible verses. All of her friends are making fun of her for it, and she's finding herself in new moral dilemmas as she grows older.

Up to this point, she has not been invested in her faith, and was confused as to why she was becoming obsessed. So, we talked about what Christianity is really about and what God promises for those who follow Him. Soon she will be coming to church, to see if God really is as caring and loving as He claims to be!

God is at work... we just have to be "open, available and ready" to respond.

Chappy Sage Rizk



The Iconic Young Life Pancake Breakfast Crew: Sage, Jonno and Sam 'the Pancake Man'