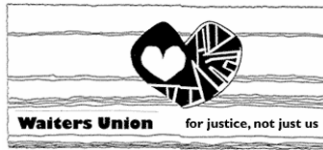


The Waiters Union About Us



About The Waiters Union

We decided to call ourselves the West End Waiters Union because we wanted to be waiters in West End. We didn't want to set agendas for people. We just wanted to be available, like waiters, to take people's orders, and to do what we could do, to help them. We particularly wanted to help to develop a sense of hospitality in the locality, so that all people, especially people who are usually displaced in areas like ours, could really begin to feel at home in the community.

We dream of a world in which all the resources of the earth will be shared equally between all the people of the earth so that even the most disadvantaged among us will be able to meet basic needs with dignity and joy. We dream of a great society of small communities cooperating interdependently to practice personal, social, economic and political compassion, love, justice and peace. We dream of people developing networks of friendships in which the pain we carry deep down can be shared openly in an atmosphere of mutual support and respect. We dream of people understanding the difficulties we have in common, discussing our problems, discussing the solutions, and working together for personal growth and social change in the light of the love of Christ. And we yearn to make this dream a reality in our own locality.

There have never been many people in the Waiters Union. We started with two households 20 years ago; there aren't more than 20 households associated with us now. The Waiters Union is not a high profile group. As waiters, we try to keep a low profile in the area. None of the activities that we are involved in carry our name. They all carry the names of the groups that organise those activities, which we contribute to, but we do not control. As a result, a lot of people in our area may know us well as people, but may not even know that the group we are part of exists. Which is fine, because the group exists to promote the community, not the group; and the group can function more effectively as a catalyst in the community if it is prepared to be more or less invisible, rather than attract attention to itself at the expense of other groups. However, we are not secretive. We welcome enquiries and answer questions as freely and as fully as we can. And we are inclusive. We invite anyone who is interested in our work - to work with us, alongside us, as partners in the work together.

All the work we do is *self-directed* and *other-orientated*. Each person has the right to shape every group that they are a part of. Being part of a group depends on participation. A person becomes a part of a group, not by jumping through any hoops, but simply by participating in the group. Once a person is a part of the group, they have the right to manage the group they are a part of. We believe people should have the right to shape all the decisions that impact on their lives. And we believe the best way for us to shape the decisions that impact on our lives, individually and collectively, is through the process of consensus. All the groups nominate rotating facilitators for their meetings so as to be careful to do, what the good book says, 'is right in the eyes of everybody.' As the groups work from the bottom up, to empower people, particularly people who are marginalised and disadvantaged, we particularly include people who are usually marginalised and disadvantaged in the decision

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making processes of the groups. So all the groups actually work with the people that they work for and, in so doing, seek to enable the people they work with, as partners, to realize their enormous potential as men and women made in the image of God.

One group has sought to promote the aspirations of the original inhabitants of our neighbourhood by lobbying for permission for them to build the as-yet-unbuilt cultural centre in Musgrave Park, which is in the middle of the neighbourhood. Another group has sought to support refugees by sponsoring their settlement and the settlement of their families, working through the anguish they go through as 'strangers in a strange land'. Last, but not least - though they are often considered last, and treated as least by the powers that be - through a whole range of groups, we have sought to relate to the people in our community, who have physical, intellectual, and emotional disabilities - not as clients, nor as consumers, still less as users - but as our friends!

None of these things that any of us are doing seem that great. However, we constantly encourage one another to remember that true greatness is not in doing *big* things, but in doing little things with a lot of love over the *long* haul. And that is exactly what we are trying to do!

We seek to support each other in a number of ways. Informally, through networks of mutual relationships. Formally, through a range of groups that meet regularly.

Monday morning from 6.30 to 7.30 am we meet for worship, reflection and planning for the week. Throughout the week people meet in a range of home groups to nurture their souls and sustain their faith and values. Sunday nights from 6.30 to 8.00pm we meet for public worship with local people in the basement of St Andrew's Anglican church.

Every two weeks we have a community meal, to which everyone is invited. Every six weeks we have a small gathering for fellowship with people in the network; and every six weeks we have a large gathering with people in our region who are not in our network but who need continuing support for their faith-based community work.

Every six months we have a two-week live-in community orientation program which provides an intensive introduction and/or re-introduction to the spiritual disciplines that are the foundation for our faith-based community work. And every twelve months we have a camp, so we have the chance to get away and just relax together.

At the heart of the community is a household dedicated to formation. Between four and eight people live in this house at any one time. A majority of the people in the network have spent time living in this more intense community household at one time or another. It serves as a resource for ongoing training in community development.

Augmenting the formation provided by the household are ongoing Bible studies and occasional study groups that explore spirituality, philosophy, politics and so on.

All these meetings are managed by the people who participate in them and while one person may act as contact for each meeting, the role of facilitator is rotated.

Activities which support or are supported by the Waiters Union

The Waiters Union often mobilise volunteers to participate in many local community groups - which may or may not identify with Waiters Union. Some of the activities which support - or are supported by - people in the Waiters Union include:

1. *An annual planning day* - a day of planning attended by around twenty to thirty people.
2. *Network gatherings* - three-hour networking gatherings of twenty people held every six weeks.
3. *Coordinating meetings* - one-hour co-ordinating meetings of five to ten people every week.
4. *Ongoing involvement with Aboriginal people* in association with Aunty Jean, a local aboriginal leader.
5. *Ongoing involvement with refugees and refugee claimants* in association with the West End Migrant and Refugee Support Group, Refugee Airfare Loans Scheme, the Refugee Sewing Group, the One World Singing Group, and E.P.M (Ethical Property Management) - a Refugee Workers Cooperative.
6. *Ongoing involvement with people* in public housing, boarding houses, and hostels who are struggling with mental and emotional distress in association with A Place To Belong.
7. *Ongoing involvement with global justice issues* through Servants, TEAR, and the Micah Challenge.
8. *Ongoing involvement in and support for alternative local economic ventures* such as Justice Products, Ethical Property Management and a backyard chook co-op.
9. *Bristol Street House* - a structured household of people with a commitment to learning about and practising community involvement with marginalised local residents, giving support in the form of friendship, assistance with living skills, conflict resolution, advocacy, etc.
10. *Community meals* - a fortnightly evening meal in a local church hall, usually attended by about forty people who bring food to share. The majority live in local supported accommodation hostels; some, who were relocated from their accommodation in West End as one of the consequences of the gentrification of the area in recent years, travel from as far away as Carindale to attend. The meals includes low key recreational activities – such as board games.
11. *Community picnics* - four times a month a picnic or similar outing is arranged for 10 to 25 people who live in supported accommodation locally and at Carindale.
12. *Community transport* - using a mini-bus and private cars, two people are rostered each week to provide transport to and from an evening service at St Andrew's Anglican Church, South Brisbane, for about 20 people who would otherwise have difficulty attending.
13. *Community fellowship* - an evening service held at St Andrews Anglican Church, South Brisbane, for about forty to fifty people, that provides people - particularly those who do not usually have the opportunity - with the opportunity to contribute to a church service, through leading, presenting, praying, sharing and so on.
14. *Community Orientation Course* - an intensive live-in course focusing on practical community involvement within a Christian community development framework with many of the more marginalised local groups and individuals. Courses are held for two weeks mid year and at the end of the year, involving about a dozen participants each time.

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15. *Project Hope* - a support network for church-based community workers in south-east Queensland, involving a discussion group each six weeks attended by 20 to 30 people and an annual retreat attended by about 45 people.
16. *End of year camp* - a weekend camp attended by around 50 adults and children.