

## Caravan of Hope

### **Mobile counseling van serves people living in rural Australia.**

Depression is a common problem in New South Wales due to drought and economic downturn—especially affecting people living in north and northwestern rural areas. Suicide Prevention Australia reports 2,100 completed and 65,000 attempted suicides annually.

In 2008, Salvation Army Captain Chris Millard—also a member of the Inverell (Australia) Rotary Club—challenged club members to do something about the problem. His suggestion was to purchase a caravan and equip it to be a mobile counseling van. The counseling center on wheels would be driven into the devastated farm territory where Salvation Army representatives could sit down and talk one-on-one with the stricken farmers and their families.



“The emotional strain on farming families takes its toll on family relationships and physical and mental health. The key to reaching them is through support services such as the Caravan of Hope so they realize they are not alone,” Kim Deans, rural financial counselor, said.

The Rotary Club accepted the challenge; however, fundraising for the first year got off to a slow start. The Rotary handpicked a committee to strategize and devise a plan.

The group arranged many activities, including a book fair, a caravan tag-along tour and a major raffle. A number of Rotary members personally donated \$30,000 and other Rotary clubs supported the effort along with the Inverell business community. In three months \$80,000 had been raised, but the fundraising continued and eventually they collected \$100,000. The final cost of purchasing and equipping the vehicle was \$90,000.

On Sept. 18, 2010, The Salvation Army took possession of the Caravan of Hope, beginning this vital ministry to people who often feel forgotten.