

ORIGIN
STORIES

Trinity

*Celebrating our shared
foundations and future*



Lutheran
Services

There for you



LUTHERAN
CHURCH
OF AUSTRALIA
QUEENSLAND DISTRICT

This story is dedicated to the many faithful men and women who came together to meet local needs and serve their region and community. The dreams and hard work of our founding congregations have made us who we are today.

Lutheran Services draws on the fundamental Lutheran tradition of care for the individual, family and community. Together with the congregations that founded us, we have served the people and communities of Queensland since 1935. The diversity, vitality and significant contribution of Lutheran Services today is thanks to these origins and this foundation.

To celebrate and commemorate these beginnings, Lutheran Services is conducting an 'Origin Stories' project—to explore, document and share the proud histories and inspirational stories behind our many services and sites.

The project is a collaboration between staff from Lutheran Services and Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trinity Origin Story owes its existence to the generous support and contributions from members of the Gold Coast community and beyond.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who made this possible. Thank you for sharing your memories, stories, poems, pictures and prayers. This remarkable history and story has been written by you.

EXPLORE OUR ORIGINS

This booklet is an abridged version of the Trinity Origin Story. See the full version and other Origin Stories here:



A vibrant congregation builds a vital community service

Since the 1970s, the Trinity Lutheran Church Southport congregation has introduced many services for their community, including childcare, schools and family support centres. Many of these services continue to this day, forming vibrant and vital parts of the Gold Coast community fabric.

This Lutheran Services Origin Story traces the development of the service known today as Trinity Community Services—a long established and leading provider of disability support services for the Gold Coast. When the service began in the 1970s, it was one of the first of its kind in Queensland.





It began with the energetic Pastor Prenzler

When a Lutheran Pastor by the name of Martin Prenzler came to the Gold Coast in 1972, as part of his service within the Trinity Southport parish, he encouraged congregation members to serve the community by reaching out in mercy to people in need. He encouraged congregation members to find ways to be of service to this part of their community.

Just a few years earlier, Pastor Prenzler had inspired and led the St Luke's Lutheran congregation in Nambour in establishing Queensland's first community-based care and support for people living with mental health concerns.

Pastor Prenzler had been dismayed by the lack of social engagement, physical support and emotional and spiritual support made available to individuals and families.

Meeting community need

The first seed of Trinity Community Services was planted in 1972 with the opening of the Trinity Workshop in Johnson St in Southport, Queensland. Although relatively short-lived, this was re-opened in 1975 with the Trinity Activity Centre at Cougal Street Southport. A thrift shop was soon added. A property was purchased at High Street in Southport.

As the service grew and evolved over the years, the name and location changed. It became the Trinity Activity Therapy Centre, Trinity Training Centre, Trinity Accommodation Support Service, Trinity Disability Support Service and ultimately Trinity Community Services.

In the 2020s, more than half a century on, Trinity Community Services supports around 45 individuals and families, and employs some 40 staff. Services include NDIS individual support, supported independent living, group-based supports, short-term accommodation and support coordination.

Trinity owns three home units providing supported accommodation, and provides 24/7 support at two community share homes. The Trinity headquarters and hub is located at Ashmore Road in Bundall.

Many hands and hearts

The Trinity Community Services of today has seen many different names, locations and service models since a fledgling sheltered workshop first began in the early 70s.

All were built with the great skill, hard work and devotion of the many, many people of the Trinity congregation, service family and local community.

And it was the dream and drive of Pastor Martin Prenzler that ignited the possibility and inspired people to come together and achieve something truly remarkable.

Every individual and every iteration have played a part in making Trinity Community Services the diverse and greatly valued service it is today.

The transition to Lutheran Community Care

In the late 1990s, increasingly complex funding and regulation requirements saw the Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District establish an umbrella organisation—Lutheran Community Care—to manage the district's community services and aged care operations. This included Trinity Community Services.

Having worked so hard and with such devotion over more than 25 years to build a disability support service for the Gold Coast community, many in the management committee, congregation, staff, volunteer and supporter network found this transition difficult. With the benefit of hindsight, we now see many aspects of this transition could have been better handled, resourced and supported.

What didn't change was the passion, compassion, vision and commitment to empowerment, advocacy, individual potential and community connectedness of Trinity Community Services.

Trinity Community Services today – part of the Lutheran Services family

Lutheran Community Care was renamed Lutheran Services in 2017. As the operator of Trinity Community Services today, we recognise the considerable achievements and challenges of the past. We thank the many congregation and committee members, volunteers and supporters for their grace, devotion and hard work. Their efforts and endeavours continue to benefit Trinity's many clients and staff today.

Lutheran Services ensures the ministry of care conceived and built by Trinity's founders continues to thrive. We hope this Origin Story will help to record, share and celebrate the incredible journey and spirit that built Trinity and continue to make it such a vital service today.

Lutheran Services There for you

As the manager of Trinity and many other community services and aged care centres today, Lutheran Services is a leading not-for-profit provider of human services in Queensland. As a department of the Lutheran Church of Australia Queensland District, Lutheran Services seeks to draw from, express and add to the life and mission of the Church. The organisation has grown out of the dreams and hard work of its founding Lutheran congregations. This Origin Story is another wonderful example.

Lutheran Services draws on the rich Lutheran tradition of care for the individual, family and community. We provide services, support and accommodation for older people, young people, families, people living with disability or mental health concerns, and people experiencing domestic and family violence. We serve many metropolitan, regional and rural communities from some 25 sites throughout Queensland—from the Gold Coast to Rockhampton.

While these sites and services are very different, they all have one thing in common: they began with a local congregation working together to meet a need and serve their region and community. These endeavours were often the first services of their kind in their region. Some were the first of their kind in Queensland. Today, they are integral and highly respected contributors to their communities and industries, providing vital care, support, employment and leadership.



ORIGIN
STORIES

Timeline

ORIGIN
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1972

- Trinity Workshop opened at Johnston Street, Southport
- 6 participants/trainees
- Founder: Pastor Martin Prenzler

1975

- Trinity Activity Centre opened at Cougal Street in Southport
- 10 participants/trainees
- Founder: Pastor Martin Prenzler
- Volunteer supervisors/assistants: Rose Schloss, Doreen Radke, Isabelle Thatcher

1976

- Volunteer supervisors/teachers: Guenther and Lyra Nembach
- Trinity Bargain Shop relocated to Chirn Park
- The Chirn Park Activity Centre expanded downstairs

1977

- Supervisors/teachers/assistants: Neville and Jenny Knopke, Doreen Radke
- First aid added to curriculum
- Horse riding program commenced

1978

- \$40,000 raised to purchase own premises

1987

- 16 participants/trainees
- Commonwealth Government funding secured

1986

- Secretary: Jenny Pemberton (nee Fletcher)

1984

- Supervisors/Assistants: Judy Gaffney, Sylvia Cambridge
- Supervisor/Teacher: Alan Tepper

1982

- Supervisors: Carl and Josie Heinrich

1981

- Supervisors: Carolyn McLeod, Helen Craig

1979

- Trinity Activity Therapy Centre opened at 146 High Street, Southport

1988

- 22 participants/trainees
- 3 units purchased for supported accommodation

- Service renamed Trinity Training Centre
- Coordinator: Julie Watson

1992

- Led development of Gold Coast Employment Support Service

1993

- Coordinator: Judy Graham

1994

- Support for clients with high needs commenced
- Relocated to Seabank Building in Short Street, Southport
- Coordinator: Angie Elmes

1995

- Coordinator: Sean De Souza

Timeline

1999

- Acting Coordinator: Jenny Pemberton (nee Fletcher)
- Lutheran Community Care established

2000

- Relocated to Meteora Building in Southport Mall
- Client Lisa Pollard Sydney 2000 torchbearer

2001

- Coordinator: Caroline McDonald

2002

- 24/7 on-call service commenced
- Relocated to Nerang Street, Southport
- Trinity administration transitioned to Lutheran Community Care

2005

- 19 clients

2006

- Acting Coordinator: Raylene Sutherland
- Manager: Kris Zarens

2015

- 35 clients
- 30 staff
- Manager: Christine Osbourne

2014

- Labrador House opened

2013

- Griffith University psychology student placements commenced

2010

- 25 clients
- Assistant Manager: Christine Martens
- Relocated to Cotlew Street, Ashmore

2008

- Manager: Edmund McMahon
- Renamed Trinity Disability Support Service

2007

- Disability Services Queensland accreditation

2017

- Lutheran Community Care renamed Lutheran Services

2018

- NDIS commenced

2019

- Manager: Rachael Shaw

2021

- Renamed Trinity Community Services
- Relocated to Railway Street, Southport
- Manager: Carolyn Nicholas

2024

- 45 clients
- 40 staff
- Relocated to Ashmore Road, Bundall

Reflections

Prof Tim Prenzler

Son of Pastor Martin Prenzler

Dad took long service leave in the 70s and travelled to Germany to explore church welfare and service initiatives. He came back inspired by what he had seen there and the opportunities here. When I was at uni a few years later, he encouraged me and some others from our Lutheran youth group to travel to Europe to further our studies and work.

When I came back, the Activity Centre needed another person so I extended my leave from uni and worked there as a full-time volunteer for six months. One of our activities was a lawn mowing service. We started every day with exercise in the backyard. There was lots of cooking and sharing meals. The participants were a happy bunch. The families were really appreciative of the Activity Centre—for the meaningful activities, learning opportunities, social engagement, community connection and making a contribution. When I had my 21st, all the participants came.

Whenever I hear the term “working bee” I think of Dad! There were always working bees, street stalls and fundraisers. I didn’t mind the physical work but it did cut into my surfing time! There were always lots of people with shovels, brooms or paintbrushes. It was very community building. Many people made major contributions. The Activity Centre couldn’t have achieved what it did without the support of so many in the congregation and community.

Mum and we four kids went to everything that went on in the church. Dad always wanted a big audience. He would say “I need you to come along and swell the ranks!” We were basically rent-a-crowd!

Dad was always very driven. He had this amazing belief and entrepreneurial zeal. He was very good at raising money, enlisting support, and rallying people for the common good. Each success drove the next. Everywhere he looked, he saw people with needs that weren’t being addressed, and he thought we can fix this. This was driven by his Christian beliefs and Lutheran ethos. I think it was also just part of his personality.

There’s a quote of Dad’s that nicely sums up his work:

“Possibly the memories I cherish most, beside the privilege of being a preacher and teacher of the life-giving Gospel, are those I can say least about. I’m thinking of the personal work done with individuals or families. I owe these people a great debt. It was just when sharing and endeavouring to bear the burdens of people’s personal problems that I often had my greatest sense of “standing on holy ground”, and experienced what a very special act of grace it is to be a Christian Pastor.”

“I am amazed by what the Trinity congregation achieved in building a disability support service on the Gold Coast in the 1970s—one of the first of the kind in Queensland. What they achieved was truly remarkable. It began with respect and dignity afforded to those in the community living with a disability, and a desire to bridge a gap in helping families and helping people with disability.”

Carolyn Nicholas

Carolyn Nicholas

Manager, Trinity Community Services

Regional Manager—Community Services South Region, Lutheran Services

I’m a third generation Gold Coast girl. I was born and bred on the Gold Coast. When I was in my early 20s, I was a single parent raising two young children. My daughter Elly had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy when she was 15 months old. Like all mums, I wanted my children to be safe, happy and part of their community.

Someone recommended Trinity Day Care—a community-based childcare centre at Southport. They were more than happy to fit in both of my kids. They weren’t especially equipped or experienced in accommodating kids with disabilities, but it was a very nurturing place with a great sense of inclusion and community connection. They made sure Elly was part of everything. They were very supportive of my situation. That allowed me to have some time for myself for study and work. Elly and the other kids were richer for the experience. Great friendships were built.

Today, Elly is a formidable disability rights advocate and a sought after speaker and writer. And I am the manager of Trinity Community Services, which began life in the 1970s as an activity centre for people with disabilities. Like that day care centre that welcomed us in, the activity centre was way ahead of its time. Both were started by the Trinity Lutheran Church Southport congregation.



While the service began with compassion, it was successfully built with the business acumen and commercial ingenuity assembled in the committee, the tireless work of an impressive number of volunteers and the unwavering dedication of all involved in supporting clients and staff. They were very good at both the business side and the human side. They were clever and compassionate. They were way ahead of their time.

That vision of inclusion and connection remains key to Trinity Community Services today. My own advocacy began with Elly and continues today with Trinity. This is our role as a service provider. This is what our sector today is striving to achieve. This is what we work hard for every day—ensuring we put the needs and wishes of people with disability at the centre of the support we provide; bringing peace and joy into people’s lives.

We embrace and support people with disability as valued and contributing members of the community. We continue to build that human connection to produce amazing outcomes. We value and support our staff for their role in achieving this for our clients and community, while building a stronger sector and career path.

In so many ways, the Trinity congregation built a remarkable foundation for service.



John Niebling

Committee Treasurer 1992–2000 & Chairman 2000–2010

Trinity Lutheran Church Southport

The Trinity Disability Support Service was very much locally run when I was involved from the early 1990s. A committee managed the service and appointed a manager who oversaw the day-to-day operation and staff.

There was great expertise assembled in the volunteer members of the committee, which included the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, several other representatives from the church and client family members. The committee also involved clients. Every meeting would also be attended by two clients who provided us with valuable feedback. These representatives would be elected by the client community.

There were about 25 clients and nearly as many staff—almost one to one. A number of clients were members of the church. We bought vehicles to transport clients—we paid cash and had six at one stage. We provided supported accommodation for clients and owned three units.

“We grew together and built strong friendships with the clients. I met up again recently with some clients from 20 years ago as part of this Origin Story project and we remembered each other’s names! We all have our difficulties and different abilities. We are all stronger for being connected. That’s the reason the service was established and the reason it’s still going today. It goes back to Martin Prenzler and his aim in establishing the service. It was probably the first service of its kind on the Gold Coast.”

After Pastor Prenzler passed away, his wife Lois would ring me up religiously to see how the service was going! She would come to functions while she was still able or send her apologies when she could no longer attend. That’s the type of people they both were. It was their life. That passion flowed through to the committee, volunteers and staff.

We would hold a function each year to promote the service to the community and strengthen connections. These events could attract up to 150 people—local councillors and MPs, business people, church people, members of the local community, clients, families, carers, staff and volunteers. We would have inspirational guest speakers, such as Perry Cross (who today is President and Founder of the Perry Cross Spinal Research Foundation and a Member of the Order of Australia). We would also come together for events such as Disability Action Week. We held special church services during Disability Action Week, inviting clients and staff to participate and contribute.

We kept the committee going for some time after the transition to Lutheran Community Care (LCC) to maintain the link between the church and the service. As governance, quality and funding requirements became more complicated, LCC eventually took over administration, and the committee disbanded.

Our involvement was purely part of being a Christian and trying to help those who were disadvantaged—whatever form that took. That’s what motivated the committee and congregation members. It gave all involved great satisfaction to see how this service the congregation had built was helping our clients and the community.

Edmund McMahon

Manager, Trinity Disability Support Service 2008–2015

Trinity Lutheran Church Southport Member

I joined Trinity Accommodation Service, as it was known then, in 2008 after working with Keystone. This was in the early days of the transition to Lutheran Community Care. I lived on the Gold Coast and was a member of Trinity Lutheran Church Southport, so there was a nice synergy. We were blessed with a great team—both in our staff and the Committee of Service, which was largely drawn from the congregation. In consultation with the Committee, we changed the name to Trinity Disability Support Service, to better reflect the community service we provided.

The disability sector was in some turmoil at the time. There was considerable unmet need in the community. What distinguished Trinity was its philosophical foundation as a proactive service supporting clients to live independently and inclusively in the community. We advocated for our clients and families, and helped them navigate the support system. We worked with government to secure better funding and support. We sourced grants and sought opportunities to do more, build our activities and service provision, and strengthen our place in the community. We built security, stability and better futures for our clients and families.

We achieved remarkable things. We trained and supported our clients to live in their own homes and get from one place to another. Building on our core services of lifestyle support, community access and supported independent living, we broadened our scope to provide overnight support and develop a range of day programs. We found fun ways to develop skills, broaden connections and create new opportunities, like our “fish-ability” program, where we supported clients to go on fishing trips. We pursued the development of new supported independent living homes.

Trinity instilled a belief in me: it’s amazing what people can do if you believe in them and you set about that with purpose. We saw how things could be done better for individuals and families living with disability in the community—and we delivered.

By developing our services and building our reputation, we grew by more than 200% in the seven years I was there. Our staff greatly valued the heritage of the service and our commitment to client needs. While the sector had traditionally experienced high staff turnover, Trinity enjoyed great staff retention.

At the time it was difficult to find psychologists with disability experience, so we implemented psychology student placements with Griffith University. This delivered benefits for our clients and we ultimately employed some of the graduates. We were chosen to host a delegation from China and share our person-centred, strength-based approach.

The Lutheran Church has played a vital role in building services, support and infrastructure in Queensland. The church emphasises the importance of grace. It also emphasises our need to witness our faith and support the vulnerable and those in need. As congregations became aware of need in their community, they took on the responsibility of meeting that need. Many valuable services on the Gold Coast have carried the name Trinity. Standard bearers like Pastor Prenzler were responsible for an extraordinary amount of good work. The things he achieved were phenomenal. He got his congregations on board and made things happen.

As Isaac Newton said, “If I’ve seen further, it’s by standing on the shoulders of giants.” The giants in this case were our congregation members and the Committee of Service they formed. The things they achieved and the service they delivered were remarkable. They were very smart. They provided a solid foundation. They had a wealth of skills and experience. They were well respected and connected in the local community. They were invaluable for me as a manager. Together we lobbied and advocated for individuals, families and our community. We earned the respect of government agencies, funding bodies and auditors.

Our faith—our Lutheran ethos—defined and underpinned us. Our client families and the community valued that connection and recommended our services. The fact that our committee members were volunteers—highly skilled, very professional volunteers—added further trust and respect. Having the church behind us demonstrated our heritage and dependability. I could clearly see God’s work in the founding and continuation of the service.

Working as manager at Trinity Disability Support Service was the highlight of my career. Joining this service attached to my church and having congregation members on the committee all aligned to build success.





Guenther Nembach *Supervisor, Trinity Activity Centre 1976*

I met Pastor Martin Prenzler in the mid 1970s at Synod in Adelaide and he mentioned he was looking for people to help with an activity centre and workshop for disabled young people in Southport. So I came up and had a look to see what I could do. I met with Pastor Prenzler, Elsa Kopp, Mrs McKenzie and other volunteers up here at Southport, and we agreed to me coming up.

So my wife Lyra, son Darren and I relocated from South Australia and we set up home and started work up there in Cougal Street. I didn't charge any wages because I could work and earn my own money. We built up the workshop repairing furniture and things we could sell at the Trinity Bargain Shop at Chirn Park. One of the local kindergartens still has some of the boxes we made!

Lyra and I also served as secretary and treasurer on the committee. We had about 16 to 18 people at the Trinity Activity Centre, including participants and supporters.

“Everyone was committed and pleased with the work they were doing and what we were achieving—building skills, confidence and independence. They were special people. You have to be a special person.”

Julie Anderson *Trinity Lutheran Church Southport Member*

My Mum and Dad, Jenny and Nev Knopke, worked and volunteered for the Trinity Activity Centre in the early days from the mid 70s to early 80s—as supervisors, teachers, treasurers and committee members.

“Mum—heart of gold. Dad—a builder and jack of all trades. The Trinity Activity Centre was such an important part of their church, community and life.”

I have fond memories of fundraising fashion parades in old fashioned clothes! I remember the joy and banter between my father and the clients—friendships remaining long after he'd left. We still have a dear friend Lisa, an original client, who is part of our lives.

Maurie Atkinson *Father of longstanding Trinity client, Jason Atkinson* *Speech given on Trinity's 40th anniversary in 2015*

Yvonne and I consider it a privilege to tell you a little about our son Jason and his 27 year “walk with Trinity”. At the age of four, it was apparent he had a disability. Forty-three years ago there were very few services available for his particular needs, or to assist us in his parenting.

At considerable expense, we engaged an organisation in Brisbane to assess our son and offer advice. We embarked on an intensive manipulative and tactile therapy program of regular one-hour sessions daily over 12 months. This involved us and volunteers. Jason's strength, coordination and sensory faculties improved significantly, but the root cause of his condition (neurological) remained unchanged.

His future looked bleak as I had been advised by professionals that most autistic adults were institutionalised. This motivated us to do all we could to give him a better future. Yvonne worked hard to find a place where Jason would be happy and learn and develop. She would not accept any agency just for the purpose of “child minding”. Fundamental Christian values within that organisation were important to her.

She learnt about Trinity, a Christian-based activity centre which provided support and opportunities for special needs people. We were very impressed with the kindness and respect given to their clients, and we were overjoyed when Jason was accepted into their fold.

A Trinity support worker named Emmie Lee saw potential in our son. She fostered his initial development and improvements soon became apparent. Jason now had the opportunity to assimilate into society. He worked in a supported enclave at a factory in Brisbane Road. He got himself to and from work and really liked it.

He was trialled for independent living and this was generally successful. Dedicated Trinity support workers trained him in many areas which included being able to commute by public transport, to take up the collections and serve communion at church, the opportunity to be taught music, etc, etc.

He was encouraged and supported by Trinity staff to continue roller skating and was supported during excursions on public transport and on a North Queensland holiday. Staff accompanied him bike riding and gave him the opportunity to develop his swimming ability. He actually finished up as regional champion in the local heats of the “Special Olympics”. Our son became someone!

This reflects the philosophy in Trinity's constitution: “In Christ's love, everybody is somebody”. That is heart-wrenching stuff to any parent of a special-needs person!

About three years ago Trinity manager Edmund McMahon negotiated strenuously with Disability Services Queensland to secure extra funding to enable our son and another Trinity client to live with support at rented premises at Paradise Point. He risked his position if this venture failed, but it didn't. We really valued his efforts. Thank you Edmund!

Trinity has always acted to safeguard Jason's interests and finances. We cannot speak more highly of Trinity and its current team leaders, Christine Martens and Sue Thompson. To us, Trinity is like family!

Trinity's charter is displayed in its office. This establishes the ethos of the organisation as designated by its founders 40 years ago. Adherence to these Christian principles has formed the basis of Trinity's success and high esteem. Qualities such as care, dedication, respect, trust, empathy, dignity, accountability and going that extra mile all fall within this charter.

On its 40th anniversary, Yvonne and I thank Trinity for the quality support given to us and our son. Trinity Disability Support Service is truly a unique and respected organisation.

What Trinity clients say

“I’ve never had so much fun since I joined Trinity. Everyone is so friendly. I’m going to renew my first aid course and do my blue nursing badge again. Just a bit of everything. It just makes my life so interesting. I just really love it. It never gets boring. We always have something new to do.”

Taryn V

“Well I had a goal about jet boat riding. You’ve got to hang on to the bars, got to put your feet down here and then we go for a ride ...I was scared a little bit and then I got used to it after a while. My friend Jenny got even more wet than me!”

Taryn M

Can you add to the Trinity Origin Story?

We’d love to hear from you!

contact@lutheranservices.org.au

“I had a really good time at Disability Week. I met a lot of friends. The public speaker was really good!”

Merrilyn

“I got a teddy bear from my 40th birthday. It’s special to me because all my friends wrote their names on it. I enjoy coming to Trinity because we do different things every week and get to meet new friends.”

Jenny



Old Trinity

By Taryn M, Taryn V, Anna, Merrilyn, Sandra, Gail, Jenny and Jocelyn

Everyone is getting their photo taken.

They’re on the stairs at the Trinity Activity Therapy Centre.

It was a hot day in summer.

Bronwyn is in the photo, she lived near Gail.

Gail is in yellow.

Deb and Sandra are in the front row.

The photo was for the opening of the centre.

Everyone was feeling good.

Big Al was there too.

We did cooking classes, sewing classes and volunteering.

We used to make things and we would have sleepovers.

We used to go horse riding too!





Explore our origins

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