



A WALL, A POST-IT, AND A BUNCH OF EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

By Neil Starkie

There's a wall in our kitchen at The Spiers Centre that you probably wouldn't think twice about. It's nothing fancy, it doesn't have a policy attached to it, no KPIs or strategy statements. It's just got a corkboard. We call it our *gratitude board*.

Staff and volunteers can grab a Post-it note, scribble a few words, and pin it up. Sometimes it's a thank you, or a moment or it's just a quiet acknowledgment that something about today mattered.

It can be deeply grounding, walking into the kitchen to make a coffee, eat one more chocolate when I said the previous was the last and notice a fresh Post-it. A small square of paper, carrying a big human truth. It lifts your soul and it lifts the day.

At the end of last year, we cleared the board. A clean slate ready for a new year of gratitude waiting to be written. I'm looking forward to seeing what appears there, unplanned, unprompted, and entirely genuine.

We do difficult work at The Spiers Centre, sometimes the stories of hardship we hear are heartbreaking.

There are days when we know we've helped, and days when we reach the very edge of what we're able to do. Through December, as demand increased and needs became more complex, our sense of that edge shifted, not because resources suddenly grew, but because people responded with care, judgement and humanity.

And yet, despite the heaviness that can come with this space, we are incredibly blessed.

Blessed with people. People who show up, who care deeply. People who bring humour, compassion, and humanity into places where it would be easy for cynicism to creep in.

Recently, one of our volunteers, someone who first came to us as a TAFE placement student around six or seven months ago, sent an email over the Christmas break. It wasn't intended as a public thing. It was simply her words, written honestly, without agenda, but it captured everything about who we are and how we operate.

This is what she wrote:

"I can honestly say that never in a million years did I expect my student placement to become what it has. 'My tribe' is genuinely what I feel you all are, and this connection is rare and precious and I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to have travelled this incredible path with you.

And much as I would stay forever in the crazy, hectic, safe and joyful place that is The Spiers Centre... the Year of the Horse is pawing at the ground and with steaming nostrils and a wild mane tossing, it's time to charge on towards the next adventure.

Not an easy decision to make actually because TSC is a special place with some extraordinary fairies, elves, pixies and various other woodland creatures and I will miss you all ... every single one."

I've read that message more times than I probably need to admit, not because it flatters us, but because it reminds me why TSC exists.

When people feel safe, when they feel trusted, when they feel valued beyond their role or title, something special happens. And that something is worth protecting and celebrating.

So, this year, as new Post-it notes slowly fill our kitchen wall again, I hope we keep noticing the small things. The quiet gratitude, the unseen kindness, the people who come for a placement or to volunteer and stay because they've found a place where they belong, a place where they matter.

And if we ever forget why this place matters, chances are the reminder will already be waiting on a Post-it note in the kitchen.