**Gospel Gloves: New life comes to the old Lismore Church of Christ**

Launching a boxing ministry for disadvantaged local kids in the disused Lismore Church of Christ hall is not what Hayley Brown expected when she took time off work to have her third child in 2019.

“After [my son] was born I took the first year off, and I just prayed, ‘Ok I’ve got no money but I’ve got time.’ And God just kept saying to me, ‘Gospel Gloves. Gospel Gloves.’

Last week the Gospel Gloves gym officially opened, with sponsors and other local leaders attending.

“I live in a housing commission area where there’s lots of struggling families, lots of substance abuse and lots of neglected kids who are always getting in trouble,” says Hayley. “So I rang a friend of mine and said, ‘I’m going to go down to the park to train kids on Friday afternoons – we’ll do some boxing. Gospel Gloves is what it’s called.’

Hayley’s friend connected her with Raymond, a born-again Christian who came to faith in jail where he met many of the kids’ dads, and he was keen to be involved.

At Raymond’s suggestion that they find a permanent home for Gospel Gloves, Hayley approached Ian Phillips, who she knew from Lismore Church of Christ, with a request to use the old hall which is situated right in the middle of two big groups of housing commission. It turned out to be the perfect location.

“Hayley explained her idea to me, and the fact that she was already doing some training with mainly indigenous kids in a park nearby. The idea made my heart sing,” remembers Ian, a former minister at Lismore Church of and now a chaplain at The Winsome and Lismore Soup Kitchen Co and Community Pastor at Lismore’s CentreChurch.

Delayed by the COVID restrictions, Gospel Gloves finally started operating out of the hall last November – life emerging once again where Lismore Church of Christ used to gather\*.

God provided the $10,000 needed to purchase a boxing ring through two sponsorships of $5,000 each from a local blueberry farm, Mountain Blue Farm and Northern Co-operative Meat Company. Other local businesses such as Bunnings and community organisation Rekindle the Spirit provided further equipment for the gym’s set up.

Now, 15-20 kids aged 5-15 show up for training every Wednesday and Friday afternoon, which always concludes with a prayer.

“We just hope it’s somewhere safe for them to go and that we can at least get one kid off the street and feel they’re not trapped in the world they’re in – that they know they are loved and valued and not forgotten,” Hayley said.

“Eventually I wanted it to be somewhere as a refuge for kids, so even if we were there an hour before and we had a computer there and they could come and have some afternoon tea and do their homework in a safe place that would be lovely. We’d love it to be a drop-in for the kids cause it’s in a perfect location and we have heaps of needy kids up there.”

*\*Lismore Church of Christ, meeting in the building in Goonellabah, had its last service in 2018. Lismore Church of Christ commenced in 1884.*