

CAMPBELL ROBERTS

FAITH, MERCY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



Campbell Roberts

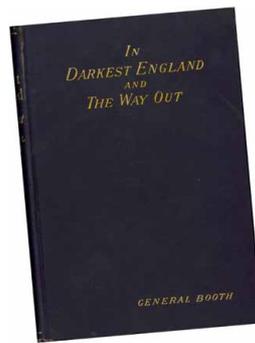
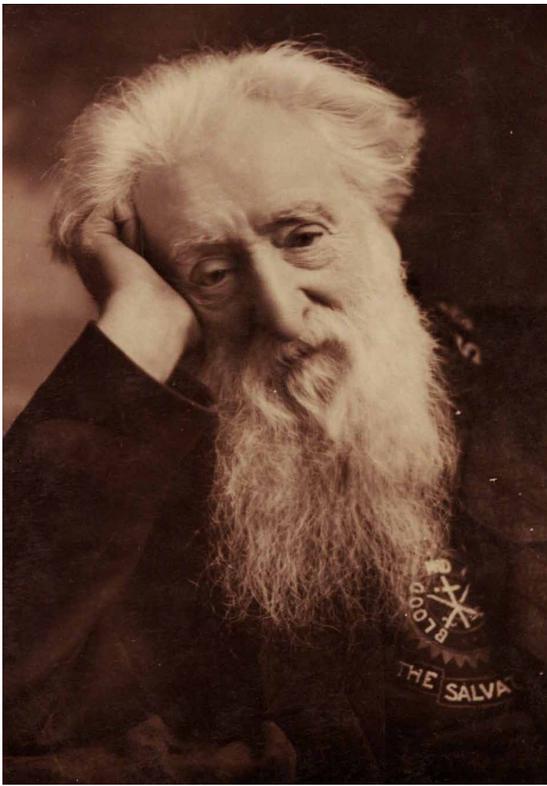
Major Campbell Roberts is the Director of The Salvation Army’s social services in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga and is a leading church and community voice on poverty, housing issues, and prison reform. He has been a long-time social entrepreneur involved with The Salvation Army’s welfare initiatives, establishing many innovations over the past 40 years – most notably in creating The Salvation Army Social Policy Research and Parliamentary Affairs Unit, one of New Zealand’s leading independent social research agencies.

Roberts stands upon a long tradition of social services run throughout the world by The Salvation Army. The founder of The Salvation Army, William Booth (1829-1912), was not just an evangelist. He was one of the most prolific and successful social entrepreneurs of Victorian Britain.

Booth was in ministry in London at a time when 10% of the population were living without basic standards of food, shelter and work. The British Government had few schemes in place which could help, and many of these efforts were not reaching the poorest of the poor.

After years of running soup kitchens and clothing stores in London’s East End, Booth decided to do a thorough investigation into the magnitude and nature of poverty in Britain. His research was the basis of his ground-breaking book *In Darkest England and The Way Out* in which he described the conditions being endured by the more than three million people living in dire conditions. The book also outlined an enterprising strategy to provide assistance for the lost, the homeless and the helpless.

Darkest England became the blueprint for the social services that were then set up by The Salvation Army. In 1890, they opened Britain’s first labour exchange – nearly 20 years before the government took up the idea of linking the unemployed with prospective



Salvation Army
General William Booth
and "In Darkest England"

employers. The exchanges were a huge success, placing over 69,000 people in employment in just seven years. Under Booth's leadership, The Salvation Army also pioneered homes for the rehabilitation of prostitutes and ex-prisoners, sheltered workshops, homes for alcoholics, cheap accommodation for men, temporary shelters for the homeless, and a missing person's bureau.

Booth never shied away from direct activism on the issues that most troubled him. His research for *Darkest England* showed him that the hundreds of employees at the Bryant & May match factory in London's East End were working in appalling conditions. Women — and children as young as eight — were working 16 hours a day on very low pay and no break for meals. Worse than this, the company used the "strike anywhere" yellow phosphorus in their matches ... the fumes of this were highly toxic and led to "phossy jaw", a rotting of the jaw-bones of match-making employees.

When Booth campaigned against these working conditions, he was told that switching to the use of harmless red phosphorus in matches would prove uneconomical. So in 1891 The Salvation Army opened a competing match factory where the matches were dipped in red phosphorous. It was a model factory where The Salvation Army employees were paid double the Bryant & May rate. British Members of Parliament and journalists were encouraged to tour the factory and compare the working conditions with other London sweatshops. The Salvation Army was soon producing and selling six million matchboxes a year. And by 1901, Bryant & May had also switched to using red phosphorus in its matches.

- Today, The Salvation Army is a multi-national non-governmental faith-based movement which delivers social services in over 120 countries. As New Zealand's Director of Social Services, Major Campbell Roberts manages over \$80 million worth of programmes covering HomeCare services, addiction services, sheltered accommodation, employment training and early childhood education.

But Roberts hasn't always held such an influential position within The Salvation Army, and he has experienced a great many challenges as a social entrepreneur fostering innovations in church engagement with poorer communities. He has found that his contributions as an activist and an innovator have not always been without controversy.

Roberts: "When an angry senior officer rings for an explanation of why you have been on the national television news (again!) supporting protestors and radicals well-known for demonstrating, and being arrested at a poverty conference, the convincing explanation doesn't flow easily down the phone line. It does hurt when colleagues call you a communist because of the causes you support, and a saintly soldier won't speak to you because you have been supporting the families of rubbish collectors on strike. It is not easy when a colleague you deeply respect says in a hurt tone, 'but I trusted you and you've let me down' because I had overlooked mentioning to him that for six weeks I lent the local corps bus and mobile social service centre (with staff members) to a group of protestors walking the length of New Zealand to protest unemployment ..."

At the first New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship retreat, Roberts spoke of how his passion for social justice was deeply reinforced by an incident that happened while he was at Salvation Army Officer Training College. He had been asked by an ambulance officer to help remove an extremely ill patient from a nearby boarding house. The patient was living within a set of three houses, each of which was home to up to 15 men. These houses were well known because all of the men were alcoholics. According to Roberts, these men were kept in misery by a landlord who had control over their welfare benefits, and took an exorbitant rent, while leaving his tenants with just enough money each day to help them continue their alcohol-fuelled existence.

Roberts: "As we entered the house, we passed a number of men in various states of intoxication until, on a sodden, stinking mattress, we found the patient ... a formerly well-proportioned male who was now a yellowing, decaying bundle of skin and bone. As we took this very ill man out of the house, he died. I was deeply affected by this man's death, as he seemed to be the victim of a massive injustice. His landlord's callous preoccupation with making money that left no room for concern about people's health and well-being had helped kill this tenant. In the days that followed I became clearer about what needed to be the emphasis of my life's work. I needed to confront evil and injustice, and ensure the lives of people were not miserable and hopeless. As I prayed, it seemed that God was saying to me of the dead man: 'I loved him; he was my son and they killed him.' My officership needed to be about breaking the chains of injustice that bound other human beings."

- Campbell Roberts' career of social entrepreneurship started in the 1970s when he initiated the Inter-Church Trade and Industry Mission, which provides chaplaincy services on a part-time basis to industry and government departments. During this time, he was part of several initiatives to address the growing levels of unemployment in Dunedin, including setting up an unemployed workers union, a drop-in centre, a restaurant and a labour collective. He also initiated and managed the Dunedin Community Work Scheme, which was an early example of The Salvation Army's national network of unemployment support programmes.



In the 1980s, Roberts founded the community service operation of The Salvation Army in South Auckland, an area of large Pacific Island and low-income families. He instituted and developed a bus programme in South Auckland that included a mobile computer learning centre, and a one-stop-shop social support centre.

Realising that a central part of the poverty issue was bound up in the cost of housing, Roberts became a key driver in the Auckland Housing Network, and in the formation of the Shelter for All Coalition, and Habitat for Humanity.

In the 1990s, he managed the total reorganisation throughout New Zealand of The Salvation Army's Social and Community Services. He was also interested in how the different faith-based organisations could better work together on social issues. This led to encouraging a taskforce approach within the work of the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, and he led its Poverty and Housing Taskforce. He has been a key player in the regular consultation meetings between church leaders and the New Zealand prime minister.

In the past 10 years, Roberts became a founding Board member of the Centre for Housing Research and of Community Housing Aotearoa. He has been a co-founder of the New Zealand Housing Foundation, and also the Rethinking Crime and Punishment Campaign (both projects led by other members of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship).

- One of Roberts' most influential initiatives in the past decade has been the establishment of The Salvation Army's Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit. This unit was started after



*Campbell Roberts outside
The Beehive, Parliament
Buildings, Wellington*

The Salvation Army took a hard look at the \$80 million worth of welfare and services they were offering in New Zealand, and asked what has been achieved. They looked at the statistics from the various areas they were working in and found out that conditions had actually deteriorated dramatically over the previous 15 years.

Roberts: “The question for us became: Do we keep doing this? We knew we couldn’t withdraw some of our services because they were helping people ... but we also had to accept that they weren’t really changing things in the community. It was time for a change. New Zealand needed to develop and implement policies that would permanently improve the social climate and reduce social need.”

The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit compiles information on significant social issues into easily readable documents, and then uses these documents to engage with the people who are actually pulling the levers in New Zealand — leaders in the media, in politics, government and the corporate world. So far, the unit has published reports on affordable housing, forgotten people, indebtedness, harmful drinking, people trafficking, and prison reform.

The unit also produces regular “*State of the Nation*” reports outlining New Zealand’s progress over a range of major social issues. These reports have quickly become a de-facto scorecard for progress in these areas, from the perspective of the community and social services sector.

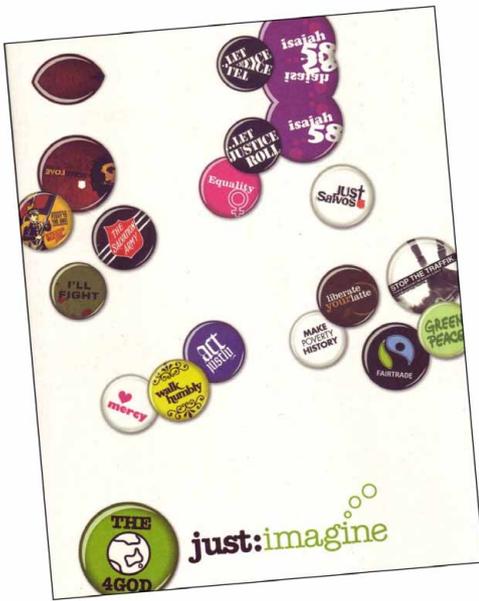
Roberts: “Often political action can be triggered by research documents that provide alternatives in an area of injustice. William Booth used the *Darkest England and The Way Out* plan on a world tour to engage politicians and people of influence. The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit reports such as “*Beyond the Holding Tank*” and “*Re-Building the Kiwi Dream*” have been successful in triggering changes to prison and housing policies...”

- The Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit in New Zealand soon attracted the attention of international Salvation Army leadership, and in 2007 Roberts was asked to assist in the setting up of an international version of the agency, based at the United Nations in New York. Called the International Social Justice Commission, this agency builds upon The Salvation Army’s participation in the United Nations since 1947, and it now has staff deployed at UN centres in New York, Vienna and Geneva.

The International Social Justice Commission has quickly become the Army’s principal international voice on social, economic and political issues, and works to assist The Salvation Army corps (churches) around the world in addressing local social injustice “... in a systematic, measured, proactive and Christian manner”. The commission has embraced the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals as a focus of its research, teaching, policy, and coalition-building work.

As the international Salvation Army movement rededicates itself to engagement on social justice issues, Roberts has taken up opportunities to offer social justice training sessions for Salvation Army officers, and he has convened a number of two-month long workshops in London for about 30 officers from around the world. For many of these officers, social justice has become a new part of their work and ministry.

In conjunction with this, Campbell Roberts worked with Australian Salvation Army officer Danielle Strickland to produce and publish a book called *Just Imagine*, which more deeply



examines social justice issues from a Christian perspective. Part of this book addresses the controversies that churches often find themselves in as they start to directly address issues of social justice, rather than simply running social services. While The Salvation Army is popularly considered to be generous and warm-hearted, there has also been criticism that it is essentially a conservative organisation often more concerned about getting funding for their services, instead of trying to change the system.

In their book, Roberts and Strickland concede that there are realistic concerns about avoiding conflicts, while maintaining respectability and credibility amidst volatile political agendas. But they argue that that governments, although they may be angry or annoyed at the criticism, are unlikely to respond by withdrawing funding if the criticism is well-founded and robust. Having the

backup of a local Social Policy Unit, and an International Social Justice Commission, is an important infrastructure that enables The Salvation Army to be a clear advocate and take leadership on systemic change.

- Meanwhile, Roberts has a comprehensive agenda on his plate as the overall Director of The Salvation Army's social services in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga. Roberts welcomes a change of culture which he believes is taking place within The Salvation Army — a change that seeks to move beyond the “silo approaches” that are usually seen in similar large organisations.

The entrepreneurial challenge here for Roberts has been in how to take new forms of structure and procedures and put them into operation in the context of their traditional services. His challenge has been to get clearer about how each service area is defined ... and then free up and empower everyone to be able to do their jobs without being bureaucratised at every point.

An example of a more innovative approach was the setting aside, by the Territorial Commander of The Salvation Army, of \$2 million to support innovators and generate entrepreneurial initiatives. The spirit of such innovation can already be seen in the new types of social services being explored.

A few years ago, The Salvation Army sold its residentially based facilities for senior citizens. With the money gained from these sales, the Army has established a service programme which is a new model of community engagement with older people. It provides a series of low-level services not currently funded by government but make a huge difference in the lives of older people — helping them to maintain their property, helping when they are temporarily incapacitated, and offering befriending and transport assistance when needed. The Salvation Army provides a hub which can co-ordinate a wider community and voluntary response to these needs.

The Salvation Army has also expanded its hospice care service, which up until now has been based on people coming into the hospice. It now provides hospice services out in the community.



*Campbell Roberts
with Gael Surgenor
at the NZSEF Retreat*

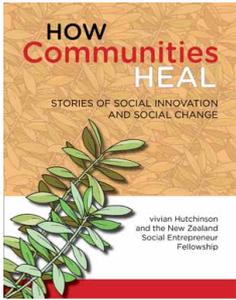
Roberts says these examples are teaching him that social problems are not usually fixed by “super solutions” that are marketed at communities: “It can be as simple as acting to connect people with one another in their own neighbourhoods. These connections introduce humanity to the issues that need to be addressed. When we connect people to one another, a transforming thing occurs which is incredibly significant.”

- Campbell Roberts has found that his participation in the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship has become a significant influence on his Salvation Army responsibilities:

“When the fellowship started, I was also beginning on a global journey in terms of social justice within The Salvation Army. There are two things that I have been able to take into this work: one has been the simple idea of encouraging social entrepreneurs throughout the world; the second has been the concept of creating learning communities. I am now asking myself: How do I identify social entrepreneurs within The Salvation Army and help them to create their own learning communities? These ideas have started a significant change of thinking within the global Salvation Army.

“The fellowship has added a point of value to just about everything I do. I’ve gained an incredible amount by the information, the readings and the thinking that has been different from mine, and which has stimulated me. The retreats have been a place where I have had the opportunity to take some time to do some thinking. And every time I’ve gone away from the retreats stimulated with new ideas and new things to consider and do.”

“At the time when the Social Entrepreneur Fellowship started, I had also just joined the chief governance board that controls The Salvation Army for New Zealand. It was a substantial change in terms of my role. Some of the ideas that I have been able to feed into that governance level have added a uniqueness to the organisation in a way that I don’t think would have, if I hadn’t been part of the fellowship group.”



Notes and Links

- This article by Vivian Hutchinson is part of the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project — stories of social innovation and social change featuring members of the New Zealand Social Entrepreneur Fellowship. It is available online at tinyurl.com/hchroberts
- *Major Campbell Roberts* can be contacted at Campbell_Roberts@nzf.salvationarmy.org, or at the Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit, PO Box 76249, Manukau City, New Zealand.
- *General William Booth ...* for more information, see *By Their Bootstraps — The Lives of Twelve Gilded Age Social Entrepreneurs* by Martin Morse Wooster (2002) at astore.amazon.com/nzsef-20/detail/O972633405 and *Through Blood and Fire — The Life of General William Booth* by Trevor Yaxley (pub Castle 1999) or the biography of General Booth by Harold Begbie is available online at tinyurl.com/y9a5ajk
- *The Salvation Army ...* see www2.salvationarmy.org.uk/history
- *In Darkest England and The Way Out* by William Booth (published 1890) can be read online at tinyurl.com/ydd8q85
- *the match factory ...* this description of the match factory campaign is taken from Trevor Yaxley's biography of Booth, and also *Entrepreneurs — Talent, Temperament, Technique* by Bill Bolton and John Thompson" (pub Butterworth-Heinemann 2000)
- *The Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit ...* more information and downloading their major reports available at www.salvationarmy.org.nz/socialpolicy
- *The Salvation Army International Social Justice Commission* is at www.salvationarmy.org/socialjustice
- *Just Imagine* by Campbell Roberts and Danielle Strickland (pub Salvo 2008). The international edition can be ordered from store.springharvest.org/product_info.php?products_id=490. An extract of the book can be downloaded (pdf) from tinyurl.com/y9n7tzj
- *Campbell Roberts* interviewed on Radio New Zealand *Ideas* programme 31 October 2010 available at www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/ideas/20101031
- Major Campbell Roberts comments taken from workshop presentations at the NZ Social Entrepreneur Fellowship Retreats at Long Bay 2007-2009, and at the NZSEF Social Innovation Dialogue on Housing Issues June 2008. Also interviews with Vivian Hutchinson for the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project 18 September 2008, and 20 May 2009.
- More articles in this series, and further information on the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project can be found at www.nzsef.org.nz/howcommunitiesheal
- Comments and conversations on this project are encouraged on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/howcommunitiesheal
- This project is on Twitter at [@HowCommHeal](https://twitter.com/HowCommHeal) using the tags [#HowCH](https://twitter.com/HowCommHeal) and [#socent](https://twitter.com/HowCommHeal)
- The online publication of the HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project has been made possible by the Bishop's Action Foundation.
- Funding for this project has also come from several individual donors, the Jobs Research Trust, the Social Innovation Investment Group, and the Tindall Foundation.
- ISBN 978-1-927176-12-2 . The HOW COMMUNITIES HEAL project is a not-for-profit resource that is licensed for distribution under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 New Zealand License creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/nz/

