

6 November 2025

Holyoake Chair's Address - Holyoake 50th Anniversary Celebration

Deb Morrow

Good morning everyone,

Thank you, Fiona, for your warm welcome and for guiding us so beautifully this morning. I'd also like to express my deep appreciation to Aunty Robyn for the powerful Welcome to Country and acknowledge that we gather today on the sacred lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people. We honour their Elders - past and present - and recognise the deep and unbroken connection they hold to this land, to community, and to culture.

On behalf of Holyoake, I'd also like to echo Fiona's welcome to our distinguished guests, valued partners, and all of you here with us today. Whether you've travelled from one of our regional locations or are joining us from right here in Perth, it's a joy to have you with us.

Today is a milestone - 50 years (and one week!) since Holyoake was officially established on the 31st of October 1975. And while our surroundings here at the beautiful Maali at Perth Zoo are stunning, what makes today truly special is not the venue, but all of you. This room is filled with people whose hearts and hands have helped shape Holyoake into what it is today.

Holyoake began as a grassroots response to the rising concern around alcohol and drug-related harms in the community. From a small base of volunteers, passionate about helping individuals and families navigate these challenges, we've grown into a respected and far-reaching organisation delivering services across the state.

From our metropolitan offices in Victoria Park and Midland, to our regional sites in Northam, Narrogin, and Merredin, and through our expanding outreach across WA - we now support people in communities large and small, remote and urban, with the same compassion, commitment and innovation that inspired our founders.

In the last financial year alone, we delivered more than 22,000 unique occasions of service, reaching close to 7,500 individuals. These aren't just numbers – they are lives supported, families held together, and futures changed.

And as we celebrate these achievements, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on those who came before us.

For me, this celebration is also deeply personal. My maternal grandparents were both part of Holyoake's early journey - first as volunteers, and later as counsellors in the late 70's and early 80's. My grandfather, who faced his own challenges with alcohol, found purpose and healing through Holyoake's work. And my grandmother - a trailblazer in her own right - helped to launch

Holyoake's family support program, recognising that behind every individual story of AOD challenge, there is often a network of loved ones who also need support.

Her commitment was enduring.

She became a Life Member of Holyoake - a pin I proudly wear today in her honour, and in recognition of the countless staff, volunteers and supporters who have poured their energy, empathy, and expertise into this organisation over five decades.

Their legacy lives on in the Holyoake Approach - a unique, evidence-based model that sees people as more than their challenges. It's an approach that blends clinical rigour with deep humanity and is guided by its key principles of Person Centred, Acceptance and Respect, Self-Responsibility, Connection and Valuing Lived Experience - principles that have stood the test of time and continue to guide every decision we make.

It also lives on in the incredible work of our team today. To our current workforce - thank you. Your dedication, professionalism, and compassion are the heartbeat of this organisation. Every story of healing and recovery and every step forward for someone who walks through our doors, is because of you.

To our Board, I'm immensely grateful for your governance, your wisdom, and your support as we navigate the opportunities in front of us, and I also acknowledge the many Directors before us who played a critical role in shaping the Holyoake we see today.

And of course, none of our work would be possible without our current funding partners. I extend our heartfelt thanks to our private donors and the WA Primary Health Alliance, the WA Mental Health Commission, the Department of Justice, the Stan Perron Foundation, and Telethon. Your ongoing trust in Holyoake allows us to meet people where they are, when they need us most.

As we look to the future, we do so with optimism. Holyoake is strong - both financially and reputationally. We are trusted by the communities we serve and by the systems we work within. We're investing in innovation, growing our reach, and continuing to advocate for the needs of those impacted by alcohol, other drugs, mental health challenges, and the many social complexities that intersect with these.

But no matter how far we grow, we'll always hold fast to our vision: to empower people to change their lives, making better futures possible.

That is what the last 50 years have been about - and it's what the next 50 will be about too.

Thank you all for being part of this journey - for celebrating with us, and for believing in the power of hope, healing, and human connection.

Here's to the next chapter of Holyoake.

Thank you.