

COVER STORY

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

HOPE AND HUMANITY FOR OUR HOMELESS

On any given night, more than 100,000 people are homeless in Australia and more than 40,000 people in New Zealand. Homelessness is often the result of many complex issues and extends beyond the common perception of “vagrants on the street”. Solving homelessness is as complicated as the reasons for its cause, and is not just an issue for governments to solve. Rotary, of course, is doing its part in all corners of our region.

A black and white close-up portrait of a man with short, spiky hair and a goatee. He is wearing glasses on his head. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting his facial features.

Graham

What did your parents tell you that you now know wasn't true?
That the world is a happy place

Homelessness extends to more than those who sleep rough on the streets. Three main types of homelessness exist, encapsulating a variety of circumstances. However, at their core, all mean the lack of a safe place to call one's own.

Primary Homelessness

This encompasses the most common vision of homelessness – those sleeping in streets or parks. The primary homeless may also scrape by using improvised dwellings, such as squatting in derelict buildings or using cars and trains as temporary shelter.

Secondary Homelessness

Homeless people in this category move from place to place, such as “couch surfers” living in the homes of friends and family for short periods. They may also inhabit homeless centres and hostels, however, lack the means to live anywhere more than short-term.

Tertiary Homelessness

Those experiencing tertiary homelessness live in housing, however, this housing falls short of minimum acceptable standards. This may be due to the lack of facilities, overcrowding, or absence of a lease providing long-term security.

Why are people homeless?

A variety of factors can lead to homelessness, many of which are beyond an individual's control. Some include:

- Financial crisis;
- Intergenerational poverty;
- Shortage of affordable housing;
- Domestic violence;
- Unemployment;
- Physical or mental health issues;
- Substance abuse;
- Relationship breakdown.

Who is homeless?

It is estimated that one in 200 people in Australia are homeless on any given night, meaning more than 100,000 people. In New Zealand, 40,000 people

live on the streets or in substandard housing – almost one per cent of the entire population.

However, these figures are only rough guides, as many homeless people, such as couch surfers, are hidden from view, without seeking help from homeless services or government bodies.

People from all age groups and walks of life suffer homelessness. A sudden financial breakdown or domestic violence incident can cast the seemingly most stable family onto the street.

However, some groups are more highly represented than others. In Australia, around 26,000 homeless people are Aboriginal or Torres

Strait Islander, and 30 per cent are born overseas.

Young people are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. According to the 2006 Australian census, 44,000 people under the age of 25 were homeless, meaning 44 per cent of the homeless population.

Many become homeless due to family poverty and abuse, either too young to work or without access to suitable employment. Even if fully employed, with youth wages ranging from one to two thirds of adult wages and lack of affordable housing or referees, obtaining a rental can be difficult. Further, young people in their late teens and early twenties are less likely to have emergency savings.

“YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TO HOMELESSNESS. ACCORDING TO THE 2006 AUSTRALIAN CENSUS, 44,000 PEOPLE UNDER THE AGE OF 25 WERE HOMELESS, MEANING 44 PER CENT OF THE HOMELESS POPULATION.”





EYE CONTACT: A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON HOMELESSNESS

Many people hurry past the homeless, casting their eyes away, or simply ignore what is a familiar sight on some streets.

Photographer Phil England's series "Eye Contact", initiated by the Rotary clubs of Perth and Heirisson, sought to change this, with the creation of 20 larger than life portraits of homeless Western Australians locking viewers with an arresting gaze.

Short written snapshots of their experiences accompany the powerful portraits, forcing confrontation of the issues they face in life on the street.

"There is a story behind every one of these people – some of their answers were very insightful," Phil said.

The exhibition spent 12 days at the Cloisters Centre in the Perth CBD last October, opened by Former WA Governor Ken Michael, before moving on to other locations in the metropolitan area. Alongside the Rotary clubs, Ascot Sign Co, Cloisters Building Management and Terrace

Photographers also proudly supported the project.

Funds raised from the exhibition will be directed towards frontline medical services provided by Homeless Healthcare, Perth's largest provider to the homeless and marginally housed.

Among the organisation's patients is Shane, a 20-year-old man who slept rough for 18 months after a relationship breakdown. He was diagnosed with diabetes after a three-day admission to hospital, however, wasn't clear on how to use insulin (and had no fridge to store it in) or the glucometre he was given with limited test strips. His diet was further restricted to soup vans, a diet high in sugar and carbohydrates. Homeless Healthcare now meets with him on a weekly basis to manage his health program and he had been found boarding space in Fremantle.

Another patient is an elderly Indigenous man called Ian, who had stepped on glass two weeks prior. He was spotted limping with a dirty

bandage at a soup van. The sutures put in place after the glass was removed had burst and grievous infection had set in. Homeless Healthcare workers cleaned and redressed the foot, and gave him a pair of clean socks donated by Rotary as well as thongs to wear. Ian was at risk of losing his foot, and still may be, however, would not have gone to hospital for fear of being admitted. He was subsequently transported to the Ruah Community Services Centre for further care.

"Most people look the other way when they see homeless people – sadly, they believe the problem is intractable; an attitude that percolates through to the State and Federal policy," Phil said. "We want the portraits to help viewers recognise the humanity in homeless people and help bring about changes in attitude by government, the business world and society in general."

FOOD



HOW ROTARY IS HELPING...

CENTRAL ADELAIDE FOOD FOR THE HOMELESS PROJECT

Since 2010, the Rotary Club of Adelaide West, SA, has run a homeless community support project, partnering with traders of Adelaide's iconic Central Market as they collect unsold fresh food products fortnightly on a Saturday afternoon, rather than seeing it wasted at the end of a trading week.

A team of three to five rostered volunteer club members, friends and supporters visit close to two dozen wonderful Central Market traders as they close off trade for the day. These businesses generously donate any unsold food products to Rotary for distribution to four local homeless shelters, including St Vincent De Paul, the Salvos and Anglicare, who feed, shelter and support hundreds of homeless and disadvantaged people across the Adelaide CBD.

The fourth charity, Centacare, supports homeless young single mothers, offering them secure temporary accommodation. A particular emphasis is building life skills, such as fresh food cooking, to enable them to care for themselves and their babies as they build independence.

Up to the end of 2017, around \$110,000 worth of produce has been collected. Cars filled with healthy food that previously would have been sent to landfill, has been delivered by the Rotary Club of Adelaide West to the charity's' kitchens.

Donors supporting the project include:

- Bakers;
- Butchers;
- Cheese stores;
- Continental food traders;
- Fruit and vegetable stalls;
- Gourmet food cafés;
- Homeware product suppliers;
- Organic product stalls;
- Smallgoods shops.

The club even receives contacts from businesses external to the Central Market and members of the public, such as a gentleman with too much fruit on his home fruit tree, who invited them into his home to collect around 20kg of excess to pass on. Everyone's contribution is highly valued.

In 2011, the Rotary Club of Adelaide West was formally recognised for this structured project with an award from the Association of Community Service Organisations (ACSO), as well as an Award of Distinction from the Premier of South Australia, which included a \$500 cheque to assist with operating expenses for the project.

In 2015, South Australia's West End Brewery's Community Benefit Fund chose the Rotary Club of Adelaide West as a major recipient of a grant for \$5000 to purchase refrigeration equipment to support this project.

For more information, visit www.rotaryadelaidewest.org or phone club president Cathy Chong on 0412 411 497 if you see an opportunity to get involved or add value to this project.



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SUNBURY NEIGHBOURHOOD KITCHEN

The Sunbury Neighbourhood Kitchen, Vic, started four years ago, when Rotary Club of Sunbury members Neil and Marianne Williams wanted to make use of the leftovers from their catering and party hire company, N&M Catering and Party Hire.

Adopted as a club project, around five volunteers began serving meals to a handful of guests, free of charge. Four years later, 60 volunteers provide dinner to 175 people every Monday night.

Initially, the project's intention was to provide nutritious, three-course meals to those who may otherwise go without. The volunteers quickly came to realise, however, their project addressed other important needs, providing companionship and social growth to sections of the community who may otherwise suffer isolation and loneliness.

"When we started, we thought hunger was all we were going to be dealing with, but there's more to it," Marianne said. "Isolation is a huge factor – connection is really important. That's what is mainly needed in our town. Some people come in to mentor others and sit there just to have a chat."

Volunteers are allocated specific roles and the opportunity to grow their skills in areas such as food



handling, hospitality and cooking. Some volunteers are the needy themselves, gaining fulfilment assisting with meal preparation, along with enjoying dinner among friends.

Funds are received from corporate sponsors and community donations, as well as through the charity's annual fundraiser, Pay It 4ward, where a buffet is provided by volunteers for supporters for a minimum donation of \$40 a head. This amount provides around 10 meals at the weekly dinners.

Earlier this year, the Sisters of Charity Foundation and the Gandel Foundation contributed towards the purchase of a new Hyundai iLoad for Neil and Marianne's catering company.

"We're extremely grateful for the support received," Marianne said. To find out more, visit sunburyneighbourhoodkitchen.org.au





Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce assisting Denise and Peter Frederiksen on one of the morning breakfasts recently at Eddie's Van.

EDDIE'S VAN

Denise Schellbach, a member of the Rotary Club of Brisbane, Qld, has been involved with running Eddie's Van for the past 17 years. The van cooks breakfast for up to 70 homeless and otherwise socially and financially disadvantaged people every morning.

The van is owned and operated by St Joseph's College Gregory Terrace, Brisbane, with morning cooking conducted by the school's teachers and senior students.

Denise runs the van during the long Christmas holiday school break, with the help of fellow Rotarians and friends. She stepped in to create the van as a Rotary Community Project after realising it was previously parked from late November to early February.

Eddie's Van is not only about providing breakfast, but about fellowship and communication with the less fortunate.

"Rotarians and friends are eager to get involved," Denise said. "They always tell me it is a real eye-opener for many of them and a privilege to assist this very worthy cause."





LOUI'S VAN

By Sue Hepburn
Rotary Club of Salamanca, Tas

The Rotary Club of Salamanca, Tas, has been a long-term supporter of Loui's Van, which hands out food and hot drinks to the homeless of Hobart every night of the year, excepting Christmas Day.

The van is operated by St Vincent de Paul and crewed solely by volunteers from all walks of life. A team of four, drawn from the members of the Rotary Club of Salamanca, are rostered on duty the third Wednesday of each month.

Teams collect donated bread and sweets from Banjo's Bakery in Sandy Bay, which they then transport to the St Vincent de Paul depot. Salad sandwiches are made from the bread, which are loaded onto the van along with hot and cold drinks and soup in thermoses when the nights are cold.

On Wednesdays, the team heads out to Glenorchy to hand out dinner to around 20 underprivileged or homeless people. They then travel to Hobart Mall, where there are up to 30 mouths to feed. Were it not for the van, many clients would go hungry for the night, and thus they are very appreciative of the effort.

Volunteers say it is a very satisfying activity, as they meet interesting people who expand on their stories once they get to know them.

“TEAMS COLLECT DONATED BREAD AND SWEETS FROM BANJO'S BAKERY IN SANDY BAY. SALAD SANDWICHES ARE MADE FROM THE BREAD, WHICH ARE LOADED ONTO THE VAN ALONG WITH HOT AND COLD DRINKS AND SOUP IN THERMOSES WHEN THE NIGHTS ARE COLD.”





SHOWER POWER

The Rotary Club of Raymond Terrace, NSW, and Raymond Terrace Lions have worked together to provide shower facilities for those in need.

After discussion with the Salvation Army on ways they might be able to assist, it emerged that many sleeping rough in their region lacked means of keeping themselves clean. This impacted not only on their health, but also their self-esteem and capacity to escape the homelessness cycle.

Terrace Tiles and Reece Plumbing contributed materials and local tradies chipped in with labour to construct the showers at the area's Salvation Army premises. Additionally, the local council donated \$1000 towards the project.

The showers were completed in early November and were officially opened by Port Stephens' mayor Ryan Palmer.

"We all like to be clean, but when you're homeless,

where can you go?" community service director John Chambers said. "The shower provides people with a safe place to wash, shave, brush their teeth and restore their dignity."

The facility has already been utilised by many men and women off the streets.

"The first man we had through said, 'This is the hottest shower I've ever had'. Word of mouth is getting out that this is a place where everyone is welcome to shower and get clean in a respectful, hygienic environment," John said.

Every person who uses the shower receives a pack of toiletries and towels, provided by the Tea Gardens Lionesses, RAAF, and Myall Art and Craft Centre.

"You might think it's just a shower, but to the people who use it, it's a means of connection, hope and transformation," Auxiliary Lieutenant of the Salvation Army Tracy Iles said.

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ORANGE SKY LAUNDRY

A cheque presentation for \$1142 was made to Make a Difference (MAD), Port Macquarie's Orange Sky Laundry van appeal, at the charter dinner of the Rotaract Club of Hastings, NSW, in August.

The night was made even more special when it was announced the appeal's fundraising goal had been reached. With total donations approaching \$110,000, the Orange Sky Laundry van had been ordered earlier that day.

Orange Sky Laundry is the world's first free mobile laundry service for the homeless. Starting in the streets of Brisbane, with two washing machines and dryers in a van, the idea has spread across Australia, with 5.8 tonnes of laundry cleaned every week. Alongside this, there are also around 1100 non-judgemental conversations between volunteers and the homeless as they wait for their clothes.

The fully fitted-out van, nicknamed "Maddy" from the Make A Difference organisation, was officially unleashed on the road on October 6. She is set to service Port Macquarie, Kempsey, Taree and Laurieton, bringing clean clothes, dignity, and positive interaction to the region's homeless.

"This news was really exciting for us as it meant we had achieved our club's first community goal," inaugural president Katie Hall said. "A group of us attended a Rotaract conference in Brisbane last year and once we viewed the presentation by Orange Sky's Nicholas Marchesi and Lucas Patchett, we knew we wanted to bring the concept to our area.

"Then we heard about another group, Make a Difference Port Macquarie, trying to do the same, so we met up in January. From that meeting, we embarked on helping them reach their \$110,000 goal."

Established only 14 months ago, the Rotaract Club of Hastings has attracted 16 members so far, and is currently the only Rotaract club based in District 9650. The small club undertook many fundraising activities to contribute to Orange Sky, including hosting a Glow in the Dark Zumba Fitness Party, with a prize going to the Best Neon Outfit.

They also ran a Bubble Soccer event – where players are strapped into inflatable balls, with only their legs sticking out, and encouraged to bounce into each other in the fight for possession of the ball.

Two members, Ben Clarke and Carly Bullard, are also on the volunteer roster for "Maddy" as she services the region.

"The members of the newly chartered Rotaract Club of Hastings have a lot to be proud of," said Christina Parkin, Rotaract Adviser from the Rotary Club of Port Macquarie Sunrise, one of Hastings Rotaract's five sponsoring clubs. "Their hard work under the Rotary banner will allow them to continue to achieve great things in to their future, not only for the community, but for themselves."

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COFFS HARBOUR SHOWER AND LAUNDRY

The Rotary Club of Coffs Harbour South's shower and laundry facility opened at the Coffs Harbour Neighbourhood Centre, NSW, in December for the thousands in the region "living on the fringe".

The project was inspired by mobile laundry Orange Sky, after the club learnt of its impact on homeless people's lives. However, it was decided for the Coffs Harbour region a stationary facility within walking distance of the CBD would be better suited. The club also decided showers alongside the laundry was optimal, so homeless people could clean themselves as well as their clothes.

The project cost was estimated at \$220,000 – a daunting amount for a club with only 12 members. They were well on their way, however, when, through an application for a Community Capital Infrastructure Grant, \$111,000 was awarded by the local Council. The Rotary club put in \$35,000 of their own funds, which was matched by the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Additional support was received from CHESSE Employment and Support Services, New Horizons and the Neighbourhood Centre, which also agreed to host the amenities on their grounds. An extension of an existing building and reorganisation of existing layouts was undertaken to provide independent operation of the laundry and shower section.

The laundry is fitted out with two commercial washing machines and four commercial clothes dryers. The shower section contains a disabled access/family bathroom area, a general access bathroom and a



Robin Hepi, left, Bill Lidster and Jim Nolan.

stand-alone toilet. A consult office, waiting area and spacious storeroom are also provided. Funds raised above the cost of installation will be put towards ongoing operational costs, such as electricity, gas and maintenance.

"We have all learnt a lot from the experience," club member Bill Lidster said. "I must confess that when the idea was first raised, I didn't have a very good idea of what a homeless person was. I had this vague idea that they slept where they could find a bit of shelter and remained out of sight during the day. I now know about primary and secondary homelessness, an increase in presentation rates, particularly including women and younger males, societal problems including sexual abuse, domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse and mental health issues. This has been a fantastic project. We are bringing it in close to budget. It is a quality build. We as a club are extremely proud of what we have delivered as can be all Rotarians."

"Homeless people are very vulnerable and a facility like this will help them maintain their self-respect and dignity as they, hopefully, find their way out of their current situation," Mayor Denise Knight said in praise of the club's efforts.





ROTARIANS WARM UP PENRITH

Over 200 waterproof jackets and jumpers were distributed to the homeless by the Rotary Club of Penrith, NSW, last winter.

Member Julia Legian, who knows the trials of homelessness firsthand, spearheaded the effort. At the age of 13, Julia and her family were forced to flee Vietnam in her father's tiny fishing boat, with Communist officials firing shots from the coastline. In the gulf of Vietnam, they were chased by pirates, and in Malaysia faced the worst storm in the history of the area, with waves of 20 storeys high capsizing their boat.

Two years after being rescued from drowning, an Australian family sponsored them to travel to Sydney. However, this was not the end of Julia's challenges, with her parents struggling to provide for seven children and the family highly dysfunctional. Julia never forgot her gratitude when the Salvos gifted them second-hand winter clothes.

At 17, she ran away and lived in a broken garage at a friend's place in Fairfield. In her early 20s, unable to afford rent, she slept in her car.

"It was an awful experience I do not wish upon

anyone," Julia said.

The jackets were distributed to West Connect Domestic Violence Service, assisting women who have fled family and domestic violence with their children. Many were also handed out directly by Rotarians at Penrith's Judges Carpark to local disadvantaged people, who visit there to access Mama Lana's food services and to use One Voice's shower bus.

"At 17, she ran away and lived in a broken garage at a friend's place in Fairfield. In her early 20s, unable to afford rent, she slept in her car. 'It was an awful experience I do not wish upon anyone,' Julia said."

Numerous recipients became teary, giving the Rotarians tight hugs of gratitude. They were amazed to have something brand new given to them.

"It was truly indescribable the happiness I felt inside," Julia said of the experience.





THERE IS HOPE BLANKET PROJECT

By Vinod Reddy

The Rotary Club of Rockdale City, NSW, distributes blankets donated by Qantas. These on-board blankets, used both on short and long-haul flights, may have a small blemish or be slightly frayed, but are otherwise in excellent condition.

Each blanket is sanitised and dry cleaned before being picked-up for storage ready to be re-homed for the needy. The success is dependant on generosity and big-heartedness on innumerable fronts, primarily from the project's altruistic sponsors.

The Kennards family, through their business Kennard Self Storage in Kingsgrove, provides safe, secure and mite-free storage. Fergusons Toyota has unreservedly and wholeheartedly stepped-in to meet all transport needs. The club currently has around 2000 blankets available, with replenishment on the way.

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Along with helping the homeless within the midst of Rockdale and in greater Sydney, this project heeded the call to assist our neighbouring country, Fiji, after it was devastated by Tropical Cyclone Winston in February 2016.

Fiji Airways carried thousands of blankets “Freight Free”, with inland transport provided courtesy of a Fiji-based Rotarian, whose forwarding company delivered the blankets to a major divisional hospital for further distribution to other district and rural hospital facilities ravaged by the cyclone.

A request for additional blankets and linen was then received, leading the club to gather thousands of blankets and purchase sheets and pillowslips. The Office of Fiji High Commission in Canberra, ACT, enthusiastically stepped in to arrange transportation, notably thanks to the dynamic, behind-the-scene work of Patty Cummins, executive assistant to the High Commissioner. Costs were borne by the generosity of the Gibson family through Gibson Freight Company and arrived in the Port of Suva just before Christmas.



Fiji High Commissioner His Excellency Yogesh Punja, right, with Vinod Reddy from the Rotary Club of Rockdale City, presenting Executive Assistant to the High Commissioner Patty Cummins with a Certificate of Appreciation for her role in facilitating the donation of linen to Lautoka Hospital.

“Words cannot truly convey the gratitude felt by the generosity of the Rotary Club of Rockdale City and their tireless efforts to help Fiji recover from the devastating impact of the cyclone,” Fiji High Commissioner for Australia HE Yogesh Punja said.

Internationally, blankets have also been distributed in Calcutta, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Papua New Guinea, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

For 2018, Qantas has offered Rotary to manage pick-up and distribution of tens of thousands of soft furnishings, including blankets, duvets, headrest covers, mattresses and other items. Pick-up will be at Qantas hubs in Melbourne, Brisbane, Los Angeles, Dallas, Dubai, Singapore and London. The Rotary Club of Rockdale City is currently managing this with Qantas and the local Rotary clubs, districts and Donations in Kind (a project of RAWCS).

If you know of another group or organisation that may require these blankets, send your formal request through the club's official website at www.rockdalecityrotaryclub.org.au



HELPING HANDBAGS

The Rotary Club of The Ponds, NSW, collects pre-loved handbags to fill with essential items, which are then gifted to at risk or homeless women.

Coordinated by dynamic community services director Zoe Bellamy, in 2016 the project amassed and distributed an impressive 312 handbags.

"This cause was something we were all really enthusiastic about. Every meeting we had club members arriving with their car boots filled with donations mustered from their workplaces and social circles," Zoe said.

Each bag was filled with a toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, deodorant, chapstick, sanitary items, shampoo and conditioner, tissues, moisturiser and other essential products. A luxury item, such as make up or perfume, was also added to each bag, to add a small pleasure to a lady's life.

The contents for the bags are donated by businesses and organisations, such as the local Priceline Pharmacy, Sukin Australian Natural Skincare and the Salvation Army Family Store. Members of the public dropped

off bags and toiletries at the local shopping centre, where the club hosts its weekly meeting, as well as at collection points set up at local schools.

The project continued in 2017 to great success, with hundreds of handbags gifted to women in December.

The Rotary Club of Balgowlah, NSW, conducted a similar project last year, collecting 90 handbags to assist the charity It's in the Bag, helping women who have become homeless as a result of domestic violence. The club launched the enterprise after realising homeless women were often overlooked in the Christmas period, with gift campaigns often focused on homeless children.

"Each bag was filled with a toothbrush and toothpaste, soap, deodorant, chapstick, sanitary items, shampoo and conditioner, tissues, moisturiser and other essential products. A luxury item, such as make up or perfume, was also added to each bag, to add a small pleasure to a lady's life."



BACKPACK BED FOR HOMELESS

National not-for-profit charity Backpack Bed for Homeless provides a specially developed Backpack Bed to homeless people without shelter. The CEO and founder of the charity, previously known as Swags for Homeless, is former Rotary Youth Exchange student Tony Clark, who travelled to Finland in 1992.

"I thought to myself, 'How would I like to be treated if I slept on the street?' Homeless people suffering from frostbite, hypothermia and trench foot are common in wealthy countries. A Backpack Bed is a crisis measure – one that can save the lives of those without shelter," Tony said.

Each Backpack Bed contains a built in six-foot foam mattress with mosquito netting, which is waterproof, windproof, fire retardant and environmentally friendly. Folded up, the backpack weighs just three kilograms.

The design has been recognised with seven international design awards / four museums, including the prestigious German 2011 Red Dot 'Best of the Best' award, where it beat 4433 other products submitted from 60 countries. In 2011, the charity won the Australian Human Rights award for Best Community Organisation.

Originally, Tony and his wife Lisa envisaged the charity would fundraise to produce and supply Backpack Beds to homeless people. However, they soon discovered the general public were interested in buying them for themselves for camping and other uses. Subsequently, the charity started marketing the Backpack Beds under

the label SEASONFORT for general sale in a social enterprise model.

Over 25,000 Backpack Beds have been freely distributed thus far in partnership with over 600 homeless agencies across Australia, with Rotary clubs from Melbourne to Yeppoon contributing funding.

"Until people are faced with living on the streets, they have no idea of what is involved. Just getting a shower, finding a toilet, or trying to wash clothes becomes a big event," said Matt, a young homeless man. "This is the third time I have been on the streets, and previously I didn't even have a blanket. Tony Clark and his organisation change the lives of people like me."

Each time a social worker gifts a Backpack Bed, they fill out a short survey recording the recipient's circumstances and experiences. This valuable information is collated into research results made available to help maintain an accurate picture of homelessness in Australia and elsewhere.

"A Backpack Bed is a crisis measure – one that can save the lives of those without shelter."

WELLINGTON HOMELESS COUNT

Wellington, NZ, Rotarians were up in the early hours of August 8, assisting with Wellington's first ever count of rough sleepers.

The effort was part of Wellington City Council's plans to end homelessness in their area by 2020. Counts provide up-to-date information to better prepare homeless services to accommodate and assign resources to those who need them.

Counters searched and recorded data between 4 and 6am in every block of the city's downtown area. Joining the Rotarians were recruits from Te Aro, The Soup Kitchen, Wellington City Council, Regional Public Health, Night Shelter and the Downtown Community Ministry.

Additionally, Wilsons parking security guards conducted their own survey to contribute to the count within private car park buildings owned by the company. Wellington Police supported the planning and safety of the counters, who numbered around 50 in total.

The Rotary Club of Wellington North has been involved long-term, supporting homeless care through aiding the Downtown Community Ministry (DCM), who help the city's homeless find sustainable housing, access support systems and manage their money. In September, the club hosted a concert featuring celebrated organist Denis Guyan, who played classical and popular favourites, with all proceeds donated to DCM.



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After the success of Backpack Bed for Homeless throughout Australia, New Zealand and parts of Europe, Tony was invited to begin distributing to the United States. Rotary clubs in District 9800 funded and transported 160 Backpack Beds to Baltimore, New Jersey, New York, Chicago, Washington DC and Las Vegas, with the assistance of District 7500.

Many Rotary Exchange students have undertaken fundraising to purchase Backpack Beds. In 2015, the District 9780 Youth Exchange students raised \$8340 through running competitions and producing

food items typical of their home culture at club and district events.

"Being a Rotary Exchange student was the best year of my life," Tony said. "It helped to develop many of the life skills that enabled me to start this charity. I thank my fellow Rotary Youth Exchange students for working with Backpack Bed for Homeless to save homeless people's lives."

To donate a Backpack Bed for a homeless person, visit BackpackBed.org or buy one for yourself at seasonfort.com

INTERACTORS SLEEP ROUGH

Over \$1600 was raised for the Street Swags Foundation at an event organised by the Interact Club at Noosa District High School, Qld, in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland.

Thirty-six high school students signed up for the event and slept rough on cardboard for a night. They made their beds on the hard floor outside the Year 9 classrooms, having to make do without creature comforts or technology. Entertainment before bedtime was board games, hand ball and chalk drawings on the concrete floor.

The Rotary Club of Cooroy, Qld, and Ritchie's Bakery donated bread and soup for dinner. Breakfast



was bread, honey and hot Milo.

Through the experience, students gained insight into the difficulties faced by the homeless, as well the positive feeling of helping others in need.



KEEPING PERTH'S HOMELESS WARM

The Western Australian Rotary clubs of Perth and the Swan Districts have come together to organise the manufacture of 500 sleeping bags at a Cambodian sewing centre, which will be shipped to Perth and distributed to the homeless before winter.

Stitches of Hope began when sewing enthusiast and current Rotary Club of Swan Districts president Kay Eva travelled to Cambodia in 2004. There, she became acutely aware of the poverty facing women in the area. She is haunted by the memory of a woman living under a sheet of tin on a roadside, who told her she had sold her seven-month-old baby the day before for \$20.

Stitches of Hope trains such women in sewing skills, allowing them to operate their own businesses or gain employment in large-scale clothing factories. It also raises much-needed funds towards shelters and schools.

"The project is creating employment opportunities for Cambodians and will help keep our homeless population much warmer during the cold winter months," Kay said. "Employment means they don't have to sell their children. It also means they don't have to sell themselves.

"Some of our team members have been to Cambodia and observed where and how the sleeping bags are now being manufactured in a Phnom Penh workshop. It's very rewarding to see a project like this benefitting people in two countries, who desperately need help in different ways."

The clubs "sold" the sleeping bags as Christmas gifts, with a \$50 donation purchasing a sleeping bag for a homeless person.

"We designed special cards to place in the sleeping

bags, some with a message from the donor to the recipient," president of the Rotary Club of Perth Stephen Inouye said.

The \$25,000 that will be raised from the sale of the sleeping bags will be reinvested in the project for future years.

The Rotary Club of Perth further supports homelessness prevention and services through its projects Path of Hope, working to assist domestic violence victims (RDU October 2017, pages 32-33), and Passages, a partnership with St Vincents de Paul helping homeless youth.

Over 18 years, 25,000 homeless young people have found life-changing support through Passages, which provides a safe place for vulnerable youth to access food, bathrooms, laundry facilities and computers. Passages staff also link these young people with critical support to help them transition off the street, such as counselling, legal advice, medical care and education.

Passages has been so successful a new, larger complex based in Highgate is in the works to replace the original Passages cottage in Northbridge.

"Many of these kids are often forced to roam the streets of Perth through no fault of their own, struggling to cope because of family violence, poverty or other circumstances beyond their control," Stephen said. "Passages gives these kids hope and the means to change their lives, but we need to make the service even better and more effective to help them meet the challenges they face today.

To donate \$50 to buy a sleeping bag for a homeless person, visit startsomegood.com/rotary-sleeping-bag-project



Long-term rough sleeper Daniel Davidson in his new home.

SHELTER



ENDING CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS IN CENTRAL AUCKLAND

The Auckland City Mission, NZ, was founded in June 1920, followed one year later by the Rotary Club of Auckland. The two organisations have shared a strong relationship over the years, which has since expanded to the many other Rotary clubs. City Mission has received huge support from Rotary members, who have donated time as volunteers, as well as contributing significant funds to Mission services assisting those in desperate need.

Auckland City Mission's Chris Farrelly says the two organisations have addressed some of the city's most painful issues during their 100 years of working together, including the needs of fatherless families following war, isolated older people living in squalid conditions, children living in poverty, those struggling with drug and alcohol issues and those dying of AIDS.

"Now, we turn to Rotary to assist us with housing the homeless," Chris said.

Like many major western cities, Auckland has a growing number of homeless people, with around 1000 sleeping rough in the city. However, there is now a growing movement not just to manage homelessness, but to end homelessness, ensuring that it is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Along with five other NGOs, and with support from the government and Auckland Council, the City Mission is part of the Housing First program. Housing First recognises it is easier for people to address issues such as mental illness and substance use, once they are housed. The priority is to quickly move people into appropriate housing and then immediately provide wrap-around services to support their success.

In the eight months since the program commenced, 288 adults and children have been housed. The Auckland City Mission, in partnership with Lifewise, Methodist Mission, focuses on the city centre, where 30 people, who on average have been homeless for 16 years, have been helped into permanent homes.

"In order to assist appropriate housing supply for Housing First, the City Mission is now about to embark on a major re-development project called HomeGround, which will include building 40 units for long-term rough sleepers and 40 units for low income people," Chris said.

"As in the past, we will reach out to Rotary for assistance with this transformational project, which we hope will be completed in our centenary year of 2020 and be part of Rotary's 2021 Centennial celebrations."

To learn more about Housing First, visit www.housingfirst.co.nz.

CHANGING LIVES ON FLINDERS STEPS

The steps of Flinders Street Station in Melbourne, Vic, are not just a traditional meeting place for pals and lovers. At night, small groups of isolated and sometimes hostile young people cluster there, because they have no home to go to.

For nearly 20 years, Anne Mitchell, program manager of Steps Outreach Service, has spent Wednesday nights befriending them. For the rest of the week, with a youth worker and a volunteer team, she follows up with practical and individualised support.

They go together to meet officials on housing, detox programs, police matters, education, finance and health. It's a time-consuming job, involving trips to far-flung suburbs and traversing the bureaucratic mazes.

"We've been helping one 22-year-old with mental health issues since she was 16," Anne said. "A year ago, she'd been sleeping in Bourke Street for six months. We found her in a haggard state; she'd reverted to drugs and aged terribly. She talked of rats and lice and scary men. Now we've got her into transitional housing and she's putting her life back together."

Anne and her Concern Australia workers become the young people's trusted adults. They are initially suspicious and sometimes aggressive, but come to realise she's genuinely putting them on course towards a better life.

"We see the softness inside them, not just the hostile shell they put on to cover the hurts and abuse they've suffered," says Anne, who is also a member of the Rotary Club of Carlton and a HESTA "Unsung Hero" award winner.

"We can always find something to like about the kids. It might be their loyalty and generosity to their friends, or their sense of humour. We build on their strengths and enhance their self-respect. When they make one small positive change it has a ripple effect."

In 2017, Steps and its 10 volunteers gave intensive support to 120 young people and aided another 200, including some families with children.

Over 90 per cent of Steps' young people are no longer homeless and have made positive life-changes.

"We keep caring for them until they find hope and progress for themselves," Anne said.

"Our job is not just finding them a room and a bed overnight. We keep helping them until they link back into mainstream society. We always remember their birthdays and share celebrations with them, like the birth of a baby or graduating from a course. Many who are now in settled conditions have come back to us at Christmas year after year to see us



again and enjoy the hot lunch and a Rotary hamper of goodies."

Steps runs with no government support. Instead, it relies on grants, donations and backing from groups like Rotary clubs, which have supported Steps for 20 years. The Rotary Club of Southbank helped create a Steps book of illustrated poetry by the homeless, and the Rotary Club of Central Melbourne has provided 800 Christmas hampers and 500 toiletry 'survival packs'. Other supporters include the Rotary clubs of Albert Park, Port Melbourne, Collingwood and Carlton.

To donate or buy Steps 2018 calendar (\$15), visit www.concernaustralia.org.au/steps or call 03 9470 2972.

WHANGAREI CITY

The Rotary Club of Whangarei City, NZ, became involved with helping homeless women after representatives from the two women's refuges in Whangarei, Te Puna O Te Aroha and Tryphina House, visited as guest speakers. When asked how they could assist, the answer was through supplying basic home items to equip their safe houses, which were practically empty.

The club began collecting household effects from people who no longer needed them. The local public's response from a newspaper article calling for help was overwhelming. Members received over 70 calls from people cleaning out, downsizing, leaving the area or just wanting to help in the first 10 days. Many items, such as linen, were donated freshly laundered and gift wrapped with soap and toiletries. In the first 18 months of this project, it is estimated 25 safe houses were equipped.

The club became involved with another project similarly assisting the displaced and disadvantaged. Magic Moments gifts food boxes valued at around \$100 to those who are unable to feed their families as they would like to. A number of these are women and children living in refuge premises, without a home of their own.

The Rotarians work alongside a regular group of helpers to pack and deliver the boxes, including International Youth Exchange students, sponsors and members of the public.

Around 80 families have received assistance so far, typically flying under the radar for support by other social service groups. The club ensures recipient lists are cross checked with the Salvation Army to prevent double-ups.

In 2017, Rotary Club of Whangarei City initiated its first Magic Banquet, an annual fundraiser for Magic Moments. The inaugural event was well received, resulting in a modest profit and raising the club and project's profile in the community.

ON A MISSION



Dave Tanare, of the Rotary Club of East Gosford, NSW, has been actively involved in caring for local homeless and disadvantaged people in the Gosford region since 2007. With the help of his club, which took on his personal mission as a major community project, Dave provides essential, everyday living items and words of hope and encouragement to those in need.

"One evening a week, I visit a local outreach centre, where volunteers from churches and community organisations provide a free meal," Dave said. "After it closes, I drive around looking for anyone who, for whatever reason, did not visit for the night. Generally, I find the odd homeless person near the local oval, in parks, behind shops and under bridges.

Dave provides all manner of items, including ponchos, sports bags, blankets, sleeping swags, radios and other items of comfort.

"Sometimes a listening ear is the best offer," Dave said. "Many just need someone to accept them and talk without judgement. They all have their own unique story.

"There is no short-term answer to the complex issues that result in homelessness and disadvantage. I am hopeful, however, that my efforts make some difference, however large or small, to some of our country's most vulnerable."

PERSONAL PASSIONS



CHANGING LIVES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE KITCHEN

Lynne Wiffen connected with the Rotary Club of Frankston Peninsula 2.0, Vic, through the Homeless Breakfast Program in Frankston, where members run regular shifts helping to serve 10,000 meals a year.

"One day my friend Trudy Poole, a Rotarian I met at the brekkie club, was driving me home and asked if I would help planting trees for Rotary," Lynne said. "I said yes, and it was the best

thing I ever did. I met some wonderful people who are now my friends. I never knew about Rotary before then."

Soon Lynne was one of the regular breakfast volunteers, stepping in when people could not do their shifts and organising the purchase of supplies with other committee members. Today, she also helps with Bunnings barbecues for the chaplaincy committee at the local High School

and shakes tins for the Salvos annually.

"The experience, confidence, kindness, support and friendship I have received from Rotarians has made my life worth living again. I am now doing things I never dreamt of before I became involved with Rotary," Lynne said.

"Lynne is a truly amazing lady and our club is so proud to have played a part in transforming her life," Trudy said.



ROTARY DREAM HOUSE

Hundreds of homeless and disadvantaged rely on charitable assistance to survive in New Zealand's Southland. Rather than selling raffle tickets or cheese rolls to raise funds, the Rotary clubs of Invercargill joined together to sell something decidedly larger – a house (RDU, Dec-Jan 2016-17, page 21).

With community assistance, they have now finished construction of the home on a property in Grasmere. Rotarians are currently hard at work implementing

the landscaping plan, getting their hands dirty laying gravel, concreting and planting the gardens alongside tradie volunteers and members of the local Men's Shed.

Proceeds from the house sale will help provide shelter, education and counselling for the homeless through Invercargill charity the Breathing Space Trust.

To follow the project's progress visit www.rotarydream.nz



HOT RESULT FOR COLD PLUNGE

The water temperature off the beach at Glenelg, SA, may have been a body-numbing 13.9 degrees, but that didn't stop 68 good-hearted individuals from taking the Cold Plunge in August last year.

The sun shone, the wind was chilly, but the "plungers" in their boardies and bikinis – and a number of ladies in evening dresses, pearls and high heels – took to the water to support services supporting the homeless.

Now in its fourth year, the event is organised by the Rotary Club of Glenelg and supported by the Glenelg Surf Life Saving Club. This year, the three-minute dip in the icy waters raised more than \$15,000.

Among the plungers were Paralympian Matt Cowdrey, Mayor of Holdfast Bay Steven Patterson, Simon Birmingham, Minister of Education and Training, Senator Skye Kakoschke-Moore, Sandy Pitcher, CEO of Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, and a number of West Adelaide Football Club players.

Not to be overshadowed by such a line-up, many Rotarians and Rotaractors also took the plunge, ably led by district governor Bob Cooper.

The funds raised were given to Mary's Kitchen, providing meals to the homeless from UnitingCare in Glenelg, Hutt St Centre, a homeless refuge for men, and Catherine House, a shelter for women – the vast majority of whom are escaping domestic violence.

Funds raised have gone towards programs such

as UnitingCare's provision of vouchers for use in pharmacies to ensure people remain on much-needed medication, as well as have access to other essentials.

Harry, a professional who lost everything due to unfortunate circumstances, was one of many to receive assistance from UnitingCare, which provided his travel costs and a voucher to purchase underwear and warm clothes.

The idea for the cold plunge originated with Rotarian Jessie Vun, who, during a teaching stint in Russia, was horrified to see homeless people forced to survive sub-zero temperatures. In response, she started a Cold Plunge with Australian and New Zealand social group Auski, which raised \$50,000 in five years.

"A few minutes in cold water cannot compare to spending a night of the streets, but it can be a bit of an eye opener," Jessie said.

On her return to South Australia, Jessie started the Cold Plunge project with her Rotary club. "It's obviously not as cold here, but people in need are people in need. There are over 5000 homeless people living in South Australia."

More than \$40,000 has been raised to support the homeless in the community over the past four years of running the Cold Plunge at Glenelg.

The Rotary Club of Glenelg has also been working with Foodbank to provide meals for the homeless hands on. Many of the members volunteered at the recent Westfield food drive held in Adelaide's three centres. During the month-long campaign, 6690kg of food donations were received, equating to nearly 4200 meals for families in need.

