

Bayswater Buzz

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Homeless help is in the swag

Each day in Australia, approximately 315 newly homeless people are turned away from charity organisations that are too stretched to accommodate them. Fortunately a Knoxfield couple are doing all they can to alleviate their struggles.

'Tony was the main instigator, he started to think about what happens to homeless people in Australia being turned away empty handed,' says Lisa Clark of her husband Tony. 'He was sitting thinking about this in church one day, and started to formulate ideas.'

The result of Tony's musing was the Backpack Bed — a windproof, waterproof and lightweight backpack that converts into a swag-style bed, which he co-designed with Lisa and which they distribute under the auspices of their charity Swags for Homeless.

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Tony Clark from Knoxfield helping the homeless with the Backpack Bed through the charity Swags for Homeless.

COMMUNITY NEWS

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The Clarks have been widely lauded for their efforts to confront Australia's homelessness crisis. In December 2011 Swags for Homeless received an Australian Human Rights Commission award. And in January Knox City Council's Australia Day Awards honoured the Clarks for their innovation, and named Tony Local Hero of the Year.

This capped off a string of local and international design awards won by the Backpack Bed throughout 2011, including the prestigious Red Dot 'Best of the Best' product design award — it was the first time Australians have won this award in its 57 year history.

Despite such accolades, Tony and Lisa have had to proceed without a cent of government assistance. For the past three years they have faced down insurmountable government disinterest and inaction as they prevailed upon State and Federal ministers to support

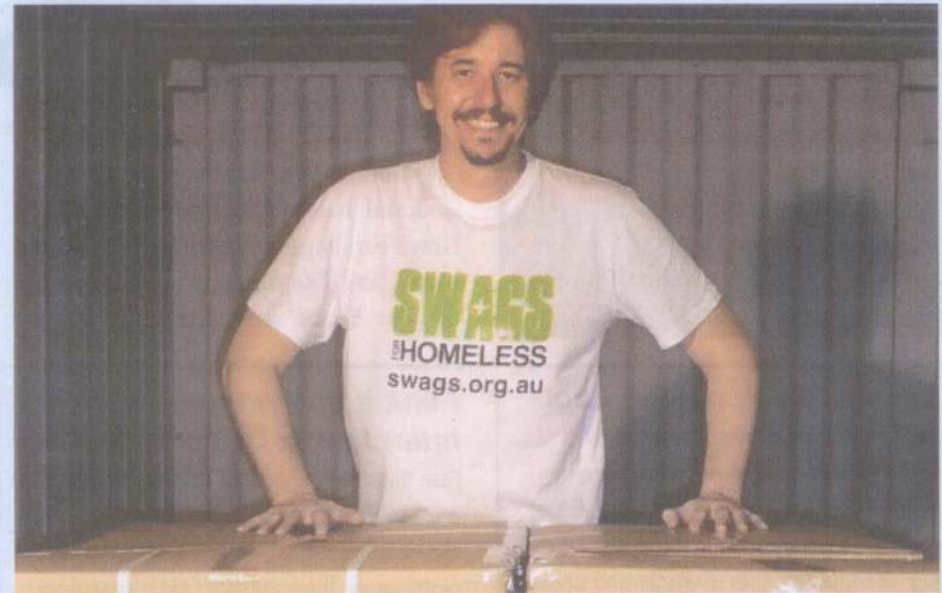
their compassionate undertaking — all to no avail.

Instead they have relied upon the generosity of private and corporate donations. 'Vodafone has been supporting me financially for almost a year as part of their World of Difference project,' says Lisa, although this funding is due to end in May. Toll transport has also generously assisted with warehousing the Backpack Beds.

Due to such support approximately 3000 Backpack Beds have been manufactured. However ultimately Tony and Lisa aim to distribute 21,000 a year to provide for the estimated 16-17,000 people sleeping rough in Australia on any given night.

More than 100 Australian charities are currently trying to get a regular supply of Backpack Beds, but are as yet unable to do so because of a lack of funds on both sides.

There is good news on the horizon. Channel 10 has chosen Swags for



Homeless as a partner charity in 2012 and will assist with a series of ads and announcements. And the Backpack Bed is to be stocked by a national retailer with 90 stores, with all proceeds to go to Swags for Homeless. The official launch will take place at the end of March. 'Keep an eye out!' says Lisa.

Swags for Homeless is a government registered charity, and donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Contact Tony and Lisa, ph: 9764 9422, email: admin@swags.org.au, PO Box 5171, Studfield 3152. www.swags.org.au

Toni Nelson and Tim Kroenert