

INSIDER



TONY CLARK

Warmth, dignity for the homeless

During Australia's colder months, emergency shelters often fill to capacity. Many homeless people searching for a warm bed are turned away, handed a piece of cardboard and a blanket for the night. Tony Clark, an IT entrepreneur, 1992 Rotary Youth Exchange student, and the founder of the Melbourne-based nonprofit Swags for Homeless, offers an alternative.

In the past year, his organization has distributed more than 3,000 swags, or portable sleeping units, to charities and shelters throughout Australia, New Zealand, Germany, and the United Kingdom. The units – called Backpack Beds and designed by Clark and his wife, Lisa (at left) – are made of a lightweight fabric and have a built-in, 6-foot foam mattress and mosquito netting. But most important, they offer warmth with their waterproof, windproof design. The entire assembly weighs only 6.5 pounds and rolls into a backpack.

Clark was inspired to start the nonprofit when he questioned why so many shelters didn't provide homeless people with proper outdoor bedding. He immediately began working on designs for the versatile beds.

"I thought to myself, 'How would I like to be treated if I slept on the street?'" Clark says. "Homeless

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The True France
ANDRE MAUROIS

Creamed Chicken Helped
ERWIN D. CANHAM

Privileges for Executives?



twist of granite in the foreground
menhirs, or stone monuments, erected
by lichens, they are thought to
determine the
issue, André Maurois wrote of his
menhirs still stand today.

INTERACT

Members:

358,110

Clubs:

15,570

RCCs

Members:

172,454

Corps:

7,498



A testament to its quality, the Backpack Bed has won four global product design awards. Swags for Homeless, founded in 2007, is the first charity in the world to win those honors.

people suffering from frostbite, hypothermia, and trench foot are common in wealthy countries. A Backpack Bed is an interim crisis measure – one that can save the lives of those without shelter.”

The bed, which can be purchased with a A\$68 donation, has won four international design honors, including the Australian International Design Award and the German Red Dot “Best of the Best” award – one of the most prestigious accolades in the product design world.

The innovative beds offer more than physical comfort, say those who have used them – they also provide a renewed sense of dignity.

“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,” says Matt, a young homeless man in Australia. “This is the third time I have been on the streets, and previously I didn’t even have

TONY CLARK

a blanket. Tony Clark and his organization change the lives of people like me.”

The success of Swags for Homeless throughout Australia and Europe has encouraged Clark to bring his Backpack Beds to the United States. Rotary clubs in District 9800, which includes Melbourne, funded and transported 100 beds to Baltimore and parts of New Jersey and New York to help the region’s homeless and those displaced by Hurricane Sandy. District 7500 (New Jersey) worked with Australian Rotarians to coordinate the effort. Swags for Homeless also donated 60 beds for distribution in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles.

“We knew we had to take this idea and spread its success to other countries in order to help save others,” Clark says. “Thanks to Rotary, it will be the first time Backpack Beds will be distributed to street-sleeping homeless and disaster victims in the USA.” – MEGAN FERRINGER