

## CEO Sleepout Experience 2010

### So the BIG question on everyone's mind is "What was it like sleeping out?"

It would be fair to say that the experience was not a true indication of what it would be like to be homeless, but I certainly discovered the discomfort of sleeping on hard ground as it was felt on each hip joint and every other projecting bone of my body.

I was disturbed regularly throughout the night by street noises; street cleaning trucks, skylarking from punters after their night out in the city, and that pesky cricket that found fit to reside in a crack next to my cardboard bed.

Fortunately the discomfort of a cold night did not eventuate; it was rather warm for a June winters night, even for Qld, so I had no need for the warm jackets and thermals packed for the night.

### What did I gain from the experience?

My awareness of the plight of the homeless has certainly been enlightened, and my desire to continue my support has been enriched. I have tried many ways to record this section of my report and after many deletions I have decided to simply "blog" points and ideas in point-form;

- I was completely taken aback by the scope of people who had become homeless.
- There is no social standing immune from potential homelessness.
- The number of women becoming homeless is increasing.
- Once someone becomes homeless the road back is a monumental challenge with many obstacles to overcome ... as an employer I would have judged an under groomed job applicant negatively with little chance of offering the job ... what chance does a homeless have???
- Mental illness becomes an issue once the cruel vortex of homelessness takes hold... depression, confusion, despair... and this becomes a critical social issue if a chronic illness develops.
- It is commonly said that many people are just 3 pay packets away from homelessness... to me that put a different perspective to the notion of people living for the next pay packet... including some of my own staff.
- Homeless people are proud and find it difficult and embarrassing to ask for help.
- A number of the stories brought a tear to my eye... One was of a volunteer who went strolling through a Southport foreshore park one evening and came across a young woman sleeping on a park bench with a suitcase underneath her... after striking up a conversation it was realised that the woman's 3 year old daughter was curled up inside keeping warm...
- I met some wonderful volunteers from Rosie's... I certainly have more respect for the work they do and would love to make time to volunteer a few nights a year on the Rosie mission...
- I was humbled by the volume of support and how a number CEO Sleepout participants I met and spoke to, already, like me, have been providing financial support to homeless charities.

## Where to from here?

- Start saving your pennies for next year's CEO Sleepout...
- I am developing a fundraising foundation called "House of Brass" that will seek donations of scrap metal that can be sold to recyclers with the proceeds going to homeless and related charities.
- I will continue to be an Advocate for the Homeless and promote related articles and efforts within the community working to help eradicate the senseless injustice that so many people in Australia do not have a roof over their head or the appropriate assistance to find them a safe environment to live, sleep, eat, and find work etc



Signing off for 2010 CEO Sleepout Experience... hoping I can help make a difference for one or more lives less blessed than my own... **Guy O'Neill**