

Wayside gets beside those in need

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A Uniting Church minister who also is CEO of Wayside Chapel, Graham Long has a firm philosophy about charity work: “You can’t underestimate the power of knowing what it is you are here to do and then having some idea about how to do it.”

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Famous beyond its infamous King’s Cross setting, Wayside Chapel is a notable Christian charity that, under Long’s watch, has gone from a crumbling relic to a thriving sanctuary. “When I came here 14 years ago, we had two employees and the building was in tatters,” shares Long, a warm and earthy leader.

“We were threatened with closure because of the poor state of the building. And we were utterly broke. Today, we have over



Minister and CEO Graham Long with Alan, a visitor to Wayside Chapel.

100 employees. We rebuilt the building, starting with no money and finished with no debt. And the place is flying; it’s just on fire.”

With 800 volunteers actively serving in the various facets of Wayside – from a rooftop community garden, to providing daily needs and church services – Long steers an unusual and prominent ministry. “Everything that you can imagine goes with King’s Cross, is what happens here. We would have about 300 people each day through the front

door. The working girls and boys show up for a shower and change of clothes. Street dwellers show up. We have about 100 aboriginal people per day come here.”

Long simply explains what fuelled the rebirth of Wayside during the past 15 years – knowing what you are about and how to do that. “We have clarity about our mission – to create community with no ‘us’ and ‘them.’”

“If you can’t explain what you are about in ten seconds, then you really don’t know what you are

about.”

Within Australia’s charity sector, Wayside’s ability to attract funding and support would be an example others wish to emulate. Long is a big believer in helping others to see what Wayside is about and enthusing them to be part of it. To that tune, 90 per cent of Wayside’s funding is from non-government sources. This allows Wayside to operate freely as a church in King’s Cross, without needing to restrict itself to the requirements of government funding.

But Long describes Wayside as “free from church speak,” as well as government language. He doesn’t want Christian jargon or statements to push away those being approached. Such communication feeds into Wayside’s desire to get alongside people and not to talk down to, or at, them.

“I’m interested in what actually happens when somebody walks in. Are they treated as a person, or as a client? Are you going to be a person, or an expert?”

“If in the end their goal is not to meet people but to push them into a Christian sausage machine, how is that not abuse?”

“We say all the time, ‘If someone feels met, rather than worked on, we had a good day.’”

Long has seen many good days when people have received Jesus in their lives, after having received other basic needs and care at Wayside. He often has noticed a significant shift in people who come to Wayside. First, they look for what they can get but they come to see beyond themselves and wish to help others. “When you see that shift, you know there is a miracle on the way.”

Despite his continued passion for Wayside and those it serves, Long is retiring as CEO at the end of 2018. He is keen to hand it on and see how someone else steers the robust charity. “Wayside is at a point where it is poised to have a very strong 10 years in front of it.”

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