

Media Release
2 October 2019



LONG WALK HOME TO HELP PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Wayside Chapel is challenging Sydneysiders to put themselves in the shoes of people experiencing homelessness by participating in Long Walk Home. The event is a 28km fundraising walk from Parramatta to Kings Cross on Friday, 29 November 2019 that will see participants walk from 5pm and finish around midnight.

The guided walk, that will be open to the public for the first time, will link Sydney's east and west in a show of solidarity, recognising that 28km is roughly the distance that a person sleeping rough will walk each week just looking for a place to sleep. This year's event, proudly sponsored by NRMA and PWC will also see staff putting on their walking shoes to support Sydney's homeless population.

The event will raise money for iconic Sydney charity, Wayside Chapel, which provides much needed assistance to thousands of people experiencing homelessness each year. For over 50 years Wayside has welcomed the most marginalised people into the safe space of community to gain equitable access to essential health, social and recreational services as well unconditional love and support without judgement.

Long Walk Home is free to register as a team or individual, and Wayside Chapel is challenging each participant to match their commitment of providing support to the people who need it most, by aiming for a fundraising goal of \$750.

Wayside Chapel will keep in touch with participants by offering motivational support, training tips, and fun fundraising challenges along the way to help people stay on track. Participants will know that every step they take will be supporting someone in need, as well as giving them a glimpse into the struggles faced, even if only for one night.

The 2016 Census revealed that 116,427 people were experiencing homelessness in Australia, representing a 13.7 per cent increase since 2011. In NSW between 2001 and 2016, the state's share of the nation's homeless increased from about 25% to a third, with most of that increase concentrated in Sydney (16.1% to 24.9%). (source: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (Ahuri))

Swinburne University and RMIT have also identified that although the homeless population has traditionally gravitated to the inner city, there is now a 'corridor' forming in Sydney, from the inner city westward, where homelessness rates are becoming particularly high. The lack of affordable housing, as well as the gentrification of previously low cost rental suburbs and major structural change is widening the gap in inequality, and forcing people to shift towards more affordable outer suburbs in order to survive.

Sydney Anglicare also estimates in that fewer than one per cent of private rental properties in Sydney's eastern suburbs are affordable for low-income earners, adding to Sydney's homeless problem.

Wayside Chapel's Pastor and CEO, Jon Owen says *"Homelessness no longer discriminates between postcodes. More people are sleeping rough, living in overcrowded accommodation, moving on from place-to-place, couch surfing, and sleeping in a cars because they just can't afford the cost of living. We thank all the people who are participating in Long Walk Home to help us raise awareness of this issue and to help us raise funds to support those who end up on the streets, walking the 28km from Sydney's west and east in honour of people without a home."*

Long Walk Home walkers will cross the areas of Parramatta, Rydalmere, Ermington, Meadowbank, Ryde, Gladesville, Hunters Hill, Drummoyne, Rozelle, Darling Harbour and finish in Kings Cross.

People are encouraged to support Wayside Chapel by registering to walk and fundraise for Long Walk Home at www.longwalkhome.com.au

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For further media information and interviews with Wayside Chapel Pastor and CEO Jon Owen, contact Janine Huan, Wayside's Marketing and Communications Manager on (02) 9581 9106 / 0409 887 797 or via email: janine.huan@thewaysidechapel.com

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Wayside Chapel

Wayside Chapel has provided unconditional love, care and support for people on and around the streets of Sydney since 1964. Each year, thousands of people visit Wayside's two centres in Kings Cross and Bondi for assistance in gaining equitable access to essential health, welfare, and related services. Wayside Chapel is well-known for its community services centres, Wingspan Project, outreach service, mental health program and Aboriginal Program. Under the banner of 'Love Over Hate', Wayside's programs and services are designed to ensure that the most marginalised members of the community have access to essential health, welfare, social and recreational services.

For further information on Wayside Chapel:

<https://www.waysidechapel.org.au>

About Jon Owen

Jon Owen became as Pastor and CEO of Wayside Chapel in July 2018. He initially joined Wayside Chapel in 2016 as an Assistant Pastor and also became Head of People and Culture based in Kings Cross. Jon is of Sri-Lankan and Indian heritage. Jon is a qualified Social Worker and for 20 years was a member of a community organisation dedicated to living and serving amongst the poor. Jon heads up Wayside Chapel and continues Wayside's mission of creating community with no 'us and them'. As an immigrant, Jon's life is testament to the power of hospitality and he is passionate about working alongside people who are socially excluded as they seek reconciliation, welcome, justice and healing and believes that Wayside's power lies in its proximity to the street.