



18 JUN, 2021

Big serve of hope

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Wayside Chapel's 'tribe' changing lives one meal at a time

KELSEY HOGAN

AS I serve a meal to Rodney, waiting patiently for his Mediterranean fish, salad and baked vegies, he looks me in the eye and smiles.

A hot meal is a way to get people through the doors at Wayside Chapel but it's the talking, the singing and the community that brings people back.

Rodney, 49, said Wayside Chapel "isn't just a place to have something to eat or a shower but a place to be reminded that you are a part of the world".

"It's all a bit blurry how I got here but I know I started with nothing and now I've got government housing, new clothes and most importantly a family," he said.

In 2018, Rodney's mother died, he divorced his wife and lost his job and said he quickly found himself losing his purpose in life.

"The staff are incredible, they're all from different walks of life, but they look us in the eye and they have time to listen," he said. "People's

lives just get better when they come here."

For dessert, the homemade profiteroles are served and the guitar comes out. Wayside Chapel visitor Loretta Mirvich, 45, starts strumming the cords to Stand By Me and soon the whole room joins in singing.

I might have seasoned the fish and chopped some vegies for lunch but the work

of staff and volunteers are what have kept Wayside's doors open since 1964.

We made 40 meals today and Wayside Chapel has provided over 50,000 hot meals to those in need during the past financial year.

While I couldn't believe the quality of food which had been donated by local producers, I realised that it wasn't what we were eating that was important, but the laughs around the table and the sense of community. It's not "us" and "them", it's not a crisis centre, it's a community that never closes its doors.

For Wayside Chapel chief executive and pastor Jon

Owen "this is the place people come when the world tells them they don't fit".

"We're not here to say yes we know what you're going through, we're here to say we can help you, you're a part of our community, and you're a part of our tribe," Mr Owen said. "It's about fostering and nurturing the potential we see in the people who walk through our door."

Wayside Chapel is asking for support from the public this winter, via donations at waysidechapel.org.au/winter

The NSW government also announced a \$57 million expansion of the Together Home program as part of the budget, to help break the cycle of homelessness.

Treasurer Dominic Perrottet said the funding would significantly scale up the pro-

gram, which has already helped to house 422 people.



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