



## **Wayside Chapel says more people will seek shelter, support and the necessities to survive this winter.**

As Sydney braces itself for bitterly cold winds and wet weather this winter, Wayside Chapel is seeking urgent support from the public to help the influx of people in crisis who will be seeking shelter, practical support and respite from the elements – as well the connection, care and love, they deserve.

Since COVID-19 restrictions eased earlier this year Wayside Chapel has seen an average of 154 people per day (Jan-Mar 2022) accessing support. As the cold and wet weather hits, frontline workers in its Community Services Centres are feeling the urgency to stave off the extreme health risks that rough sleepers face, from COVID-19 as well as the deadly flu virus, in a vulnerable population that already suffers from many pre-existing health conditions and lower immunity.

Wayside Chapel CEO and Pastor, Rev. Jon Owen says, “Even the most hardened rough sleepers may be able to survive on the streets during other seasons, but during winter many seek urgent respite into emergency accommodation just to avoid the bitter cold. It becomes a daily battle to seek shelter and the basic necessities. Like all of us they need hot showers, cups of tea, blankets, warmth – as well as love and connection to survive.”

Previously during COVID-19 lockdowns, many rough sleepers could access longer-term hotel accommodation which provided welcome respite to enable them to regain their energy, be engaged effectively by support agencies and transition into long-term housing. However, since restrictions have eased this is no longer the case, and rough sleepers who visit Wayside Chapel often experience a range of barriers to accessing crisis accommodation.

“Rough sleepers may not have ID, a postal address, bank records or even the means to travel to an appointment, so do not have the capacity to navigate the red tape of the housing process. Many are living with mental health issues, or are dealing with chronic health conditions. In many ways the struggle to survive now is worse than during lockdown.”

Wayside Chapel recognises these complex challenges and provides flexible emergency accommodation referrals and support for people who fall through the cracks, working closely to transition them into appropriate long-term housing with wrap-around care. Through the generous support of our community, Wayside Chapel provides alternatives to a housing system that has often let them down and works closely with government to try to advocate for visitors and address these barriers more effectively.

COVID-19 also threw into focus the health risks of the vulnerable and winter is an even more critical time. Many long-term rough sleepers struggle to access healthcare at the best of times. For those experiencing long-term homelessness life expectancy is already 30 years less than the standard population, a need to prioritise basic physical needs such as food, water and a place to sleep, means medical needs are often untreated. They may also have a deep distrust of the medical system due to complex trauma, and fear of virus infection.

For this reason, Wayside Chapel works closely with partners like Kirketon Road Centre (KRC), and St Vincent's Homeless Health to ensure medical access is available. Wayside Chapel also has plans to launch its own primary health service onsite at its Kings Cross Community Services Centre, to break down the access barriers by offering a tailored GP service where they feel safe and welcome and that treatment can be provided as needed.

This winter, support services will also focus on other key areas; providing a safe space for Aboriginal visitors to move from a state of trauma to connect with their cultural strengths at their Aboriginal Cultural Centre; and dedicated women's wellbeing and domestic violence support to ensure that women don't become homeless.

And beyond the vital necessities, the point of difference that the organisation prides itself on is its person-centred approach and mission of “creating community with ‘no us and them’”, building trust and relationships first, enabling a person's issues to be accurately identified, and only then coordinating wrap-around care plans tailored specifically to visitor's diverse needs.

Jon Owen says, "To build rapport with the people we support, we've needed to take into consideration the complexity of each person's situation and needs, and tailor our programs and specialised staff in a way that delivers support effectively to our community. The least spoken about part of what we provide people is love, rapport and the bonds of connection. Only when people feel this trust, can they feel the confidence to take steps towards healing. It's about providing critical support at the right time so that people don't become homeless or isolated. We are asking people in the community to help us continue to deliver that critical support this winter to the people that need it most."

**Wayside Chapel are urgently asking people to donate by 30 June to their Winter Appeal at [waysidechapel.org.au/winter](https://waysidechapel.org.au/winter)**

- END -

**For interview requests for Pastor / CEO Jon Owen, or Wayside Chapel Ambassadors Indira Naidoo, Claudia Karvan or Christian Wilkins contact Janine Huan, Wayside's Marketing and Communications Manager on 0409 887 797 or via email: [janine.huan@thewaysidechapel.com](mailto:janine.huan@thewaysidechapel.com).**

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

#### **About Wayside Chapel**

Wayside Chapel has been providing 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 Beach, to access essential health, welfare, social and recreational services. Wayside Chapel is well known for its Community Service Centres, dedicated Aboriginal Cultural Centre, specialised visitor support services and The Wingspan Project – a youth employment pathway. Wayside's social enterprises include its op shops, the Heart Cafe in Bondi Beach and two community cafes. In 2022 Wayside Chapel plans to launch a primary healthcare GP service onsite, as well as a new Women's Program that will provide a dedicated safe space and support for all those identifying as women, whom at risk of, or experiencing, domestic violence.

For further information on Wayside Chapel visit [waysidechapel.org.au](https://waysidechapel.org.au)

#### **Wayside Chapel Statistics**

From Jan 2022 – March 2022 Wayside Chapel provided:

- On an average day 154 people accessed support from Wayside services
- 8,427 low cost meals served
- 4,901 clothes, underwear and blankets
- 1,525 instances of support delivered by van and foot
- 1755 hot showers and toiletries provided
- 3452 instances of care coordination including housing, Centrelink, healthcare and legal support
- 445 instances of practical assistance delivered through Kirketon Road Centre (KRC)/ Wayside Chapel Partnership
- 25% of visitors to Wayside Chapel are Aboriginal
- A third of visitors in care-coordination at Wayside Chapel are women

#### **LISA'S STORY, visitor to Wayside Chapel for over 15 years**

Lisa had been sleeping rough for many years before she arrived at Wayside Chapel. She didn't have much with her. Due to previous traumas, she struggled with mental health issues and drug addiction. Despite the challenges life threw her way, Lisa never gave up. From food and clean clothing to emergency housing and medical assistance, Wayside was the safe space where Lisa could seek refuge when she had nowhere else to go. During her toughest days, she felt isolated. But she knew, there would be someone who would listen to her and get her back on track. Today Lisa is two years clean and happier than ever. Wayside supported her in finding long-term, stable housing which gave her the security and safety net she never had. Lisa says, "Some days, I would feel isolated, and helpless. Wayside never turned me away. They'd always listen to me and make sure I was safe."