



# *Matthew Talbot*

Homelessness is a growing problem in today's society. According to a recent report, the number of those sleeping rough in Sydney is at a five-year high, with a staggering 23 per cent increase since August 2014.

So, those who help them face an uphill challenge in trying to meet their needs.

Story by Nigel Bartlett



***“So many of the people we work with have experienced major trauma in their lives,” he says, “and we now know we need to be sensitive to this in order to be most effective in helping them make positive life changes.”***

The Matthew Talbot Hostel in Woolloomooloo run by the St Vincent de Paul Society, is a temporary home for those who have no home. There, 50 paid staff and more than 400 volunteers work with more than 350 people a day, giving them a place to sleep, feeding them three hot meals a day and providing all sorts of support services.

Jay Gleeson, the hostel’s service administrator, says the work can be highly challenging, but there are plenty of rewards. *“Balancing all the needs of our residents alongside the practical aspects of running a service as large as this tests our team’s ability to problem-solve and respond to difficult situations,”* he says.

*“Fortunately, though, we see the positive outcomes of this work when our residents take steps forward, whether*

*that’s finding stable accommodation, employment or even just opening up and accepting the help we offer them.”*

One former resident in particular, springs to mind. *“He stayed at the Matthew Talbot Hostel on and off for a number of years and was reluctant to accept help because he believed he was ‘not worth the trouble’,”* says Jay. *“Our persistent staff however, kept chipping away at him until he begrudgingly accepted our help with housing.*

*“Fast-forward 12 months and now he has a home of his own and only comes into the hostel once a week to share a meal and a laugh with the friends he’s made here.”*

Good news stories such as this wouldn’t be possible without adequate funding, and for this the hostel is reliant on donations to top up the limited state government funding it receives.

*“A large portion of our funding comes from charitable donations, without which we would quite simply not stay open as an accommodation and support service,”* says Jay. *“This is very much the case for our meals*

*program. These contributions come from the wonderful generosity of organisations such as Fairfield RSL, as well as individuals who donate directly or think of our residents when making arrangements for their wills.”*

In addition to making financial donations, Fairfield RSL collects clothes for hostel residents and twice a year its staff members set up a barbecue on a street near the hostel, feeding 200 to 300 homeless people each time and giving them a bag containing toiletries, other products and a few treats.

Jay has seen great improvements in the way homeless people are being helped, the biggest one being a broader understanding why people end up on the streets. *“So many of the people we work with have experienced major trauma in their lives,”* he says, *“and we now know we need to be sensitive to this in order to be most effective in helping them make positive life changes.”*

Positive change is what it’s all about for Jay, the staff and volunteers at Matthew Talbot Hostel. And that’s why their work is so important.