



## End Youth Homelessness

*“We surround our kids with ‘uncles’ and ‘aunties’, people who will turn up for them every time.”* Susan Barton AM

An interview with Maggie Hamilton

While some [social] issues seem insurmountable, if we want to find solutions, to turn things around, we need community engagement. It’s about opening up opportunities so others can help out, suggests Susan Barton, creator of the Lighthouse Foundation. Established to assist homeless young people, the Foundation has been going for more than thirty years.

‘Without consistent funding, we’ve had to work hard to fundraise each year’, Susan explains, adding, ‘We never get to reach as many children as we want to, but we are absolutely committed to a future where every single child has a safe, nurturing home. If we can inspire the whole community to work with



us on this, I know we’ll get there.’ Susan’s focus on homeless children began during a trip to Sri Lanka, to help out in a newly opened nutritional creche for severely malnourished children, especially girls, from poverty-stricken families who were no longer able to support their kids.

Witnessing this level of need Susan, a mother of two small boys at the time and six kids now, was determined to do something for homeless children back in Australia. ‘I’d no background in assisting homeless young people,’ she admits. ‘I was fired up by my deep love of my own children, and felt every child should have that.’

**SUPPORT LIGHTHOUSE TO**  
*end youth homelessness*  
**FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH**

*‘Making homelessness a thing of the past has to be our goal.’*

‘As anthropologist Joseph Chilton Pearce points out it only takes one person to care, to turn a child’s life around,’ Susan reflects. ‘Traumatised children don’t need a house, they need a home We need to get kids out of refuges, where they often end up interacting with up to forty people in a week, so there’s no chance for them to form any permanent attachments.’

Lighthouse has created several different programs to meet the different needs of homeless children. Therapeutic homes provide 24/7 live-in care and a dedicated Therapeutic Case Manager to help highly vulnerable young people to heal from the trauma they have experienced and develop practical life skills. The Young Parents and Babies program provides an additional layer of care by supporting young parents to develop parenting techniques and strong attachments with their babies, to help break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.



# Heart Connections

Inspire – Celebrate – Unite

Journey to  
the Heart

The Young Women's Freedom Program provides safe, secure homes and therapeutic interventions specifically for young women and girls who have escaped forced marriage, domestic servitude and other forms of modern slavery and gender-based violence. This is the only program of its kind in Victoria.

Lighthouse's Foster and Kinship Care Program provides therapeutic support to children and youth, as well as their carers. Carers have access to 24/7 on-call support and a Hub Home, at which they can access clinical support, advice and regular respite. For young people who are at risk of homelessness but don't need intensive, 24/7 support, Lighthouse offers an outreach program called Community Connect. Through this program Lighthouse works with housing providers and other organisations to set up a tailored support network for the young person.

'As one psychologist we worked with put it, children need to experience healing within their community, and then be supported to find their own special place within that community' says Susan. 'So, that's why we have established a community committee for each Lighthouse home. Committee members become fierce protectors of our kids. Here our young people interact with three or four carers. With this membrane of support, we help grow their resilience, and these kids get a real sense of belonging.'

*"Surround yourself with people that are smarter than you, that have a different perspective, so you can get a wide range of information."*



VISIT: [lighthousefoundation.org.au](http://lighthousefoundation.org.au)

Heart of Australia (26 October)





Heart Connections  
Inspire – Celebrate – Unite



We work hard to find out what each child needs - their dreams, what fulfils them. It may be something as simple as a horse ride or trip to the beach, a mentor at university. We surround them with 'uncles' and 'aunties', people who will turn up for them every time.' For Susan a key part of her work is about providing psychological safety and wellness for the young people her organisation works with.

Today the Lighthouse Foundation has assisted more than 1100 young people and continues to expand their reach. Inspired by Dame Doria Cordova, Founder & CEO of Excelled Business Schools and Money & You, along with Robert Kiyosaki, author of Rich Dad, Poor Dad, Susan has learned to tackle big issues by 'chunking them down' to manageable sizes, and by attracting a wide range of support. 'Surround yourself with people that are smarter than you, that have a different perspective, so you can get a wide range of information,' she counsels.

'Making homelessness a thing of the past has to be our goal,' Susan insists. 'No-one should be

homeless on our watch, especially our children. I'm absolutely committed to ending homelessness in Australia. It's happened in Utah and in Finland. We need to work to make this happen here. The solution requires collaboration across all sectors – government, not-for-profit and the private sector.'

'We work with all three sectors, including all three levels of government, and a huge range of diverse and committed partners, to provide holistic care for our kids and to advocate for improvements to child-focused systems and policies.'

'I want all of us to work together, to end youth homelessness forever..'



VISIT: [lighthousefoundation.org.au](http://lighthousefoundation.org.au)

Heart of Australia (26 October)