

Quietly transforming kids' lives

Continuing a regular series on volunteer organisations, this month *Pittwater Life* shines light on the wonderful local youth work undertaken by The Burdekin Association.

What a difference some care and comfort can make - particularly if you're a troubled teen.

Here on the Northern Beaches, some quiet achievers have been tackling this challenge since the 1980s - and yet very few know what their organisation is called, let alone what they do or why they're so important.

Introducing The Burdekin Association, a non-profit life-assistance group for disadvantaged and homeless youth and also those at risk of becoming homeless.

Not only does the association provide accommodation options but importantly support and hope to young people aged 12-24, ensuring they can "strive to be all that they can be".

Chair of the Burdekin Association Justene Gordon told *Pittwater Life* their overarching aim is to provide young people on the Northern Beaches with a sense of worth and belonging and leave them "feeling like someone cares".

The association's work began more than three decades ago as 'Granma's Crisis Youth Refuge' in then-rural Ingleside, supported by local service clubs and operated by volunteers

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And there's no shortage of needy clients.

In the past year alone, the Burdekin Association has assisted 128 young people and their families, housing 74 individuals and providing counselling services and family reconciliation support to the others.

And it seems to be working, with many finding a job and further education while in continuing care.

It's a simple but challenging formula: each troubled child or youth is supported by one case worker, so each child's needs are met and they feel special and cared for.

The reality is that with more houses and more resources, the Burdekin Association could help many more individuals.

The Burdekin Association has another role - it is the lead agency in the Northern Beaches Project, a collaborative pilot project involving local services and secondary schools in the Pittwater,

calling themselves "The Godmothers".

This eventually morphed into the Burdekin Association, named after former Federal Human Rights Commissioner Brian Burdekin (who wrote the 'Our Homeless Children' report which detailed child poverty and abuse in Australia, and exposed governments for failing to look after children in their care).

The Burdekin Association's charter is to not just provide a refuge or safe house, but also develop a model for ongoing care, mentoring and trust and most importantly, give realistic incentives to kids to transform their lives and break the welfare chain.

Manly and Warringah areas whose aim is to reduce family breakdown, school disengagement and homelessness.

Justene explained this small yet powerful grass-roots organisation is reaching out to the community and making informal connections with local businesses to help provide things the young people they are assisting struggle to access.

"It's important they have easy access to the same things their peers have so they don't stand out," she stressed. "This may include driving lessons, or formal dresses, or haircuts or tutoring."

The association is holding a golf day at Cromer Golf Club on Tuesday May 3, which they hope will also serve to educate the broader community and local businesses about their aims and work.

Unlike some bigger charities with widely publicised profiles, the bush telegraph is quietly spreading the word of Burdekin's achievements and increasing needs.

Perhaps it's appropriate a former Burdekin client, Ruth, has the final say:

"Burdekin provided me with not just a place to live but a home when I was 13," she said. "Like a member of their family, I was supported and housed with them for eight years."

"During this time I completed my HSC and then went on to do a double degree at Uni. I dread to think where I would be now if I did not have Burdekin's consistent and genuine support. Thank you!"

If you are interested in helping Burdekin continue to offer its outstanding community services, phone Megan Davenport on 8976 1777 or visit www.burdekin.org.au

- Lisa Offord