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Wool's heart-warming help



Hayley Olsson's first feature, Project Warm Heart, aims to raise awareness about homelessness.

THE offer of a free blanket is eagerly snapped up by a group of homeless people in Sydney's CBD.

The fact it's spring and unseasonably warm matters little.

"They disappeared in seconds," says Hayley Olsson.

She's seen first-hand how valued blankets are - and not just by the homeless, but by the services that support them.

They know a blanket will keep someone who is sleeping rough alive at night.

It's what prompted a group of woolgrowers to donate the funds to make 1000 blankets and distribute them to Sydney's homeless with the help of St Vincent's Hospital – and what prompted Hayley to tell the story of the good work being done to tackle it.

She calls the resulting film, *Project Warm Heart*, her “two year passion project”.



[Click here to watch a trailer for Project Warm Heart](#)

Her first feature, the 26-minute documentary is designed to raise awareness about homelessness and the work being done by non-government organisations to tackle it.

“It’s easy to focus on what a shocking problem it is but I wanted to show the good work that was being done, that there are people making a difference,” Hayley said.

The 23-year-old Sydney-based film maker, who grew up on the family’s farm at Goulburn on the NSW Southern Tablelands, freely admits she knew little about homelessness before she started.

“When I went to distribute these blankets I started a much greater journey of discovery,” Hayley said.

“I had the same misconceptions most people have - that there was a lot more housing than there really is and that people were homeless because they wanted to be.

“But 80 per cent of women on the street are there as a result of domestic violence.

“For others, it’s a result of a mental health issue.

“Nobody chooses this.”

Her father Chick, who came up with the idea of making the blankets, said few thought of homelessness as a big issue in Australia.

“But in areas like (Sydney’s) Potts Point, there’s something like one homeless person among every seven people,” he said.

“That’s not okay.”



AWGA - News Update

Blankets, the Olssons note, won't solve the problem but will help people survive and get a better sleep at night.

"Getting a better night's sleep helps people make better decisions the next day," Chick said.

He also sees it as a way for the country, specifically woolgrowers, to help address what most view as a city problem.

"We want wool to be part of the community in every way – and if we can do something to support a part of the community, I see that as a great message to attach to our industry," Chick said.

For Hayley, the blankets gave her a "thread" to weave a story she hoped would raise awareness about homelessness, particularly with her own generation.

It's already working.

A private screening of her film at Parliament House in Sydney last month drew a big crowd of her friends, whose own perceptions of homeless have now changed.

"All of them are now keen to do something help, whether that's donating to one of these organisations or volunteering," Hayley said.

The Australian Wool Growers Association (AWGA) was among those who donated funds to make the blankets.

Chairman Rob McBride, Tolarno Station via Wentworth, said while wool blankets weren't a solution to homelessness, he hoped they might provide someone living on the street with some warmth and the knowledge the community cared.

"It's a way to show we have a heart, that we feel an obligation to look after others in the community and that's a great asset for an industry to have," Mr McBride said.

He urged others to get behind the initiative and help the project deliver a warm night for more people sleeping rough.

It's hoped the project won't end here.

The Olsson family is hopeful of replicating it in London next year – and spreading the warmth of the Australian wool industry further still.

The *Project Warm Heart* documentary premieres on FarmOnline on November 29 at 8pm.

<http://www.stockandland.com.au/news/agriculture/rural-lifestyle/general-news/wools-heartwarming-help/2679589.aspx?storypage=0>