



Iconic Sydney charity reveals 50% increase in visitors in the past year, as it marks a 60-year milestone and kicks off winter campaign

As the mercury drops and most Sydneysiders retreat to the warmth of their heated homes, it's sobering to realise that hundreds of people will be sleeping on the streets in inner-city Sydney tonight, and across the city, thousands of people are experiencing homelessness every night.

Rising interest rates, cost of living pressures and a shortage of rental homes are just some of the factors that are continuing to drive homelessness and street sleeping.ⁱ

The iconic Wayside Chapel has been supporting the homeless and those who have fallen by the wayside of society since the 1960s, this year marks their 60th year in operation, and they are seeing more and more people come through their doors.

“Just in the last year, we’ve seen a 50% increase in daily visitors. Last winter, we saw an average of 276 visitors a day. That's almost 100 additional visitors each day compared to the previous year at our centres in Kings Cross and Bondi, and we’re expecting that to grow even further as winter sets in.

“We need to be there for these vulnerable people, with open arms. But it’s getting harder.

“The need for our services is stretching us, and demand is still rising. We want people to know they can always come to Wayside, but once they’re here, we must be able to give them the warmth and welcome they deserve,” says Wayside Chapel Pastor and CEO, Jon Owen.

A 2024 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report showed there was a significant increase in people receiving specialist homelessness services last year. The Inner West showed the highest increase with 1,496 receiving help in 2022-23 compared to 1,251 the year before. This was followed closely by Canterbury-Bankstown, Penrith, Sydney and Wollongong.ⁱⁱ

It is important to note that homelessness is not just about living on the street, the Australian Bureau of Statistics also defines homelessness as someone in short-term or emergency accommodation (such as living temporarily with friends or relatives). Homelessness NSW cites a shortage of 221,500 social and affordable homes across the state, with rents hitting record highs and demand for homelessness services soaring 10% in the first three months of 2023.ⁱⁱⁱ

Each year Wayside Chapel and their team of dedicated volunteers and staff run events to raise money to be able to continue to provide these much-needed services to the homeless of Sydney and beyond. This winter, they’re asking Sydneysiders to once again stand with them and [‘Warm a Heart’ by making a donation](#) to provide a home-cooked meal, warm clothes and a hot shower to a person sleeping rough on our streets’.

There are [packages available](#) so that people know exactly what their donation provides. For as little as \$38 – as much as many Sydneysiders pay for their lattes in a week - people can make a meaningful contribution to a vulnerable person living rough.



“It’s thanks to these initiatives and the generous community donations that we’ve already provided more than 23,000 freshly cooked meals since the start of 2024 and welcomed more than 250 visitors each day,” Pastor Owens adds.

Andrew’s Story

Wayside Chapel is known for its stories behind the many visitors who have entered its doors over the years. Many of these people have become an important part of the fabric of the organisation. One such person is Andrew.

As a young, gay man, Andrew left his country town to come to Sydney, searching for a community that would accept and love him for who he was. Like all of us, he just wanted to feel like he belonged.

Sadly, Andrew quickly found himself on the streets – an outcast in a city that can be cold and unwelcoming.

“I saw a funeral here at Wayside, where the person who died didn’t identify as male or female and Jon Owen just respected the absolute hell out of that.

“That was a turning point for me. I thought, this is somewhere where I’m going to come and hang out, because I’m going to be accepted here.

“I want to make sure there is always a place that’s warm and inviting for anyone trying to survive on the Sydney streets this winter. But, with the rapidly growing need for our services, we urgently need your help to make this a reality,” Andrew says.

Wayside’s Landmark Programs

Wayside Chapel caters to those on the margins and has developed specific services that help meet the culturally specific needs of its visitors including immigrants, women, LGBTI+ and Indigenous visitors.

Wayside’s Pathways program meets with visitors individually and helps start them on job training, work placement or social support. The program helps people answer the question ‘where to from here?’ so that visitors can get back on their feet and take their next step in life.

Wayside’s dedicated Aboriginal Cultural Centre is designed to support Aboriginal visitors moving from a state of trauma to reconnecting with their cultural strengths. Guided by the Aboriginal Healing Framework, which utilises a holistic, culturally safe approach it offers counselling, advocacy, referrals and more.

Wayside’s Women’s program gives all visitors who identify as women the opportunity to receive gender specific support and connect within a supportive community. The program has specialist domestic and family violence care coordinators available to work on complex cases with referrals to other agencies including housing, welfare, addiction, and legal support or simply provide necessities like Opal cards, clothing and food vouchers to women in need of support.



Please donate to the 'Warm a Heart' campaign this year to help keep these programs going:
www.waysidechapel.org.au/warm-a-heart

If you would like to find out more about volunteering visit:
<https://www.waysidechapel.org.au/volunteering/>

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ⁱ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/regional-housing-and-rental-crisis-deepening>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/homelessness-and-homelessness-services>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Housing-and-homelessness-funding-amounts-to-crumbs-.pdf>