

MEDIA RELEASE



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Toowoomba's youth haven turns 30 and announces merge

Thirty years ago, a Toowoomba high school teacher and youth worker decided to build a house where young people experiencing homelessness could live while they completed school.

It was an ambitious plan that demanded significant time, resources, volunteers and personal sacrifice to make happen.

David Caruana and Dianne Surtees returned to their old hometown today (3 November) to celebrate the 30th anniversary of their shared goal.

The Haven, which is located on a tranquil rural block west of Toowoomba, is the city's only dedicated supported transitional accommodation for young people aged 16 to 18 years who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

Residents are supported by on-site staff who strongly encourage education, employment and independent living skills.

Around 1000 young people have called The Haven home and many credit it for helping them finish high school and finding the skills and confidence to lead healthy adult lives.

"Young people come to The Haven often with not much more than the clothes they are wearing but always with the unwavering determination and resilience to overcome the challenges they are facing," said The Haven's manager Amanda Dalton.

"We are privileged to support them to achieve the best possible outcomes in education, housing, employment and wellness in their personal lives," she said.

"We respectfully acknowledge that at times, families and young people may find themselves in a difficult situation and we are honoured to be able to offer a safe place, support and understanding."

Amongst the 90 guests that will gather at Inbound Brassiere for the 30-year celebration is local builder Hamid Magzub who donated his labour for the construction of The Haven in 1986.

Armed with only an old newspaper clipping, Ms Dalton scoured the internet and was delighted to discover that Mr Magzub and his wife still lived and worked in Toowoomba.

Well-known Toowoomba land developer Clive Berghofer, who donated the excavation of the building site, will join them at the event along with past residents, community organisations, support workers, teachers and donors who have supported The Haven over the past 30 years.

"The Haven was purpose built with the love, support and generosity of many individuals and groups from Toowoomba," Ms Dalton said.

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“Without their support, and David and Dianne’s vision and tenacity, The Haven as we know it today would not exist.”

“We are so pleased that many of them are joining us today to recognise and celebrate everyone’s contribution to this important community facility.”

The Haven committee will also announce its official partnership with Toowoomba not-for-profit organisation, YellowBridge QLD.

The merger is a strategic step to secure its long-term viability by collaborating with a larger organisation that shares similar values and a commitment to youth.

YellowBridge QLD Chief Executive Officer Penny Hamilton said The Haven’s youth program would join the organisation’s existing programs in community housing, disability support and elderly home services.

“At YellowBridge, our core value is about supporting and connecting people in our community who need a helping hand to lead safe, secure, fulfilling and independent lives,” Ms Hamilton said.

“We are thrilled to welcome The Haven into our organisation and be able to offer our robust systems, processes and resources to support its operation.”

“So many young people in our community rely on The Haven to be a safe and encouraging place for them during a difficult time in their lives. We want them to always have that option available,” she said.

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YellowBridge QLD is a local, independent, not-for-profit organisation that provides housing, disability support and home services across Toowoomba, Southern Downs and Lockyer Valley regions.