



Build a Better World

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Letter From Nicole

It is with mixed emotion that I introduce our first newsletter for the year.

We have always felt connected to and grateful for you, our wonderful supporters and community – you are in many ways, an extension of the Habitat for Humanity family.

On behalf of our family, and the families you support, I sincerely hope that you and your loved ones are in good health at this time of great worry and uncertainty.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all our lives rapidly, in ways that seemed unimaginable just a short time ago. With each passing day we find ourselves trying to adapt to the measures required to combat the spread of the virus. In countries and cultures all around the world, we have been told to “stay at home” to help contain it.

Sadly, we know that there are far too many families for whom this isn't as straightforward as it sounds. The uncertainty so many of us feel today, these families have felt for a lifetime — if not generations.

When any disaster hits, whether it is a storm, a disease, or financial crisis...the reality is that it's almost always the most vulnerable who feel the greatest impact. This is true of the communities we work in, particularly for our neighbours across Asia and the Pacific, living without a safe and decent place to call home.

In our own backyard, it seems like the last of the destructive bushfires has only just been extinguished. We welcomed the New Year as our country burned.

Lives, homes, wildlife and habitat lost forever. For many, it has been a devastating start to the year, and our hearts go out to all who have been affected.

But there is hope, which I hope you will feel after reading the stories of two families in this newsletter.

We are stronger during our toughest times, and amidst all of this, there have been some beautiful reminders about the kindness, generosity and resilience of the human spirit. A genuine willingness to want to help those doing it tough, to care for and support those most vulnerable.

No one is certain about what the days, weeks and months ahead will bring.

However now more than ever, I am confident that we will continue to work through it together.

I am truly humbled and very grateful for your support and partnership.

Please do take good care.

NudeStannae

Chief Executive Officer



SCEGGS Build

In October last year, Sceggs Darlinghurst sent 53 students and 10 teachers to Siem Reap in Cambodia to help build 5 homes for vulnerable families in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

The common problem for these families was that most lived in housing shelters made of wood and palm leaves, leaving their homes vulnerable to the harsh weather and insects.

The students assisted by building new, upgraded homes made of timber, providing access to adequate housing, health, and opportunities for the families to be in a better financial position.

Following the build, Sceggs produced a beautiful book full of photos and well wishes which were presented to the families, who stood proudly in front of their new homes.

Some of the students also expressed what the build experience was like for them:

During my five days of building not only did I form stronger relationships with my build group but I learnt so much about the family we were building for and how different their lives are. - Tui

I believe that the experience was very worthwhile and it is a trip I will never forget. I learnt a lot about the culture in Cambodia and the relationships that we made with the local community overcame the language barriers. The families were very grateful for what we had done and the hand over ceremony was very sad, yet happy at the same time. - Emma

I think this trip was so eye-opening and really helped expand my world and make me a more thoughtful, conscious person. - Phoebe

Bushfire Devastation *and Hope*

Annie & Chris

When I arrived at Annie and Chris's property in the Adelaide Hills, it was difficult to get an understanding of what had been lost. Habitat volunteers had arrived and were being briefed by Annie on what needed to be done to return their property to what it once was before the bushfires.

Annie was on a mission, and it was obvious we were in for a long day of hard work ahead.

We were there because not long ago, a fire had ripped up the hills, across dry land and trees and engulfed their home in flames.

Annie, Chris and their two teenage children had moved in only 12 months earlier. Annie had grown up in the country, but most recently had lived nearby. An avid gardener, Annie spent many hours on the property tending to the plants, and watching countless kangaroos bounce around the paddock from the balcony. Her kids would be doing typical teenager things like hanging out by the pool cabana, making memories.

The area was not considered a fire-risk as it's not densely populated, but all that changed just before Christmas on December 20.

The day started with some concern as they had seen the warnings about an increased fire risk on the TV. But with the fire over 20kms away, and the winds in their favour, they didn't expect to be impacted.

Heeding advice from Chris's mother, they packed up some things. This included piling two cats, a dog and chooks in the back of the ute. One cat couldn't be found, so they sadly had to leave without her.

That afternoon, they sat at Chris's mum's flat in a nearby suburb. There was no cause for alarm, until they turned on the news and saw a Channel 10 news crew in what they barely recognised as their front yard, filming what used to be their family home.

"It was unusual as the fire crept up the hill after crossing a paddock, before hitting our block," Annie said.

I asked what those first moments were like for the family, and while obviously distressing I got the idea this family wasn't one to go to pieces.

"This is how our family copes. We weren't going to die in a hole."



"We even had a laugh that night as we told the kids 'Well, I guess you're not getting any presents this year for Christmas!'"

"However we quickly came to the realisation that we didn't own anything. We don't own a hat...shoes.... We just had what we were wearing that day. Going out in public was quite difficult initially. We'd carry garbage bags around as we received some donations of goods but had nothing to carry them in."

They had some good news a couple of weeks later as the cat they had to leave behind, named Lolly, was found by a neighbour. Lolly had burnt paw pads and needed to stay in an animal hospital for 35 days.

In the weeks and months to come there was a lot of time to reflect on their situation.

"We don't feel hard done by. There are so many others who lost a lot more. Our neighbours livelihood is their vineyards which were destroyed completely. Others who rely on the land for an income are really struggling."

Annie explained that they now run their business out of the shed that sits right next to where the house was, virtually untouched by flames. The business, now powered by a generator, has suffered, and the bills just keep coming and *'they only get bigger.'*

She started to list a few – such as the 150m trench they need to dig to get power back, and replacing fencing, that will cost in the tens of thousands. Even Lolly the cat's bandages had to be replaced daily for \$150 a pop.

The family moved quickly into 'work mode' and have been spending three days a week for the last two months working on the property.

"The clean-up is a much bigger job than the construction."

It was very clear to me how tough Annie and her family are. The job they had to do to rebuild their lives wasn't one they asked for, or expected, but they were getting on with it because that's just what needed to be done.



Throughout her story, she showed emotion when talking about the kindness of strangers, like the Habitat volunteers who were with us that day.

"I've never met so many people willing to give up their time. It's just unbelievable and it blows my mind. The manpower that Habitat has provided...the encouragement and support has been incredible. We can see it here today and without this it would take us so much longer to get back on our feet."

"The progress we've seen today with the help of the volunteers has probably saved us two months of clean-up."

Annie and Chris are now looking ahead with hope and positivity.

"We are closer to our neighbours than we were before. Also, the kindness and help of total strangers and organisations like Habitat for Humanity is amazing, so thank you."

Every day is a fight, but today, for the first time in a long time, when I look at the property I am not looking at death. All I can see is new growth."

Supporters like you should be proud, as the work of the volunteers is only made possible through your donations.



Sinclair and Janet had built the bridge with their own hands 37yrs ago – another real labour of love. They've spent many happy times on the island having lunch and high tea, with their dog Tuva.

Sinclair & Janet

After driving through a police barrier at 5am on the morning of December 21, Sinclair and Janet feared the worst.

Both cried as they inched closer to their home.

"It was apocalyptic. Fires were still alight in the trees and spot fires were in the paddock. Everything was black," Janet remembered. "We broke down when we saw the tip of the roof as we knew at that moment that the house had survived."

The day before they had prepared the house the best they could. The sprinklers were turned on, the barbecue gas bottle removed, and cattle hand watered and walked to the dam for safety. The home was quite clearly a labour of love for the couple, both in their 70's.

Having invited me in for a cuppa, they spoke from the heart about what the house meant to them.

"We've been here for 37 years, when we were in our 30's. Since then we have poured our heart and soul into this place, and any extra money we had."

After 53 years of working life, Janet had only just retired in November and was ready to put her feet up...sort of.

"When you live with Sinclair putting your feet up in impossible!" she laughed.

So when the impact of the fires dawned on them, it was overwhelming. A studio to the side of the house had been badly damaged, a caravan was destroyed, and the fencing and pine trees were reduced to blackened sticks.

"We just didn't know where to start. Physically, in our 70's we haven't got the energy we used to."

With their children and six grandchildren helping, they have pulled together by dividing weekends to clean the property. But it wasn't until the Habitat volunteers showed up that they could see light at the end of the tunnel.

"The team of volunteers cut and piled up dead trees, carted wood and removed the damaged fencing in a matter of hours."

Sinclair proudly walked me to the huge pile of debris that had been stacked, ready to be removed, dragging an errant branch behind him. Seeing him standing next to the pile hit home just how long this would have taken him without the support of Habitat supporters like you.

"We think we're lucky but it really gets to you. I was crying for a couple of days after the fire. You don't know where to start."

"This was the first time we've ever needed help. We've paid taxes and looked after ourselves, but we really needed help. And organisations like Habitat for Humanity were here for us. It's not just the work you do, but to know that morally, someone is helping us is overwhelming."

We've got kids in their 40's who will benefit from this place. All the bits and pieces we do here are to help our kids in the long term. That's why it's so important we restore everything we can from the fire."

Janet expressed how much she valued the support of Habitat and the volunteers helping out.

"I really got a taste of the other side of volunteering. They were so respectful and didn't make us feel disadvantaged for asking for help. We are very grateful."

One volunteer in particular was special to Janet. A 15 year old daughter of a volunteer said at one stage on the day that she felt useless. Janet spoke with her to say *"We value you just for being here. From then on she was beaming."*

As I left Janet said thank you again, and to reiterate that she thought 'so many others were more deserving.' I politely disagreed.



Special Request

Over many years, the support of wonderful people like you has been so important in helping to partner with families to build or improve a safe, secure place they can call home.

You have achieved so much through your generosity and we're so thankful for you!

The global nature of the terrible Covid-19 pandemic is a humbling reminder of our common humanity and vulnerability. That is why we are determined we must continue to be there for the families and communities we work with over the weeks and months to come, when they will need us more than ever before.

If you are in a position to give at this time, please complete the enclosed donation form, call 1800 99 55 88 or donate online at www.habitat.org.au/newsletter

For more information, visit:
habitat.org.au