



Man with a van gives back

After reading an article in his local paper entitled 'It's easier to turn away than to care' about homeless and disadvantaged people, orthodontist and NAB Private Wealth client **Dr John Brabant** felt compelled to take action.

Six months later, his project The Carevan Foundation became a reality, merging John's personal passion for helping those less well off with his professional interest in orthodontics.

John shares the story of Carevan with Private Word.

There were a couple of triggers that put me on the path to starting The Carevan Foundation. Just over 11 years ago, I had a nasty malignant melanoma, two heart attacks and a double coronary artery bypass – all within four months. In surviving these, I felt I needed to do something that would make a difference to people's lives.

But it wasn't until I read an article in my local paper The Border Mail two and a half years ago about homelessness in the Albury-Wodonga region that I actually did something about it. The headline just really bothered me: 'It's easier to turn away than to care'; I just found myself asking, why?

So, perhaps rather naïvely, I went out and bought a South American sausage van with the plan of serving food to those who needed it. I gave the Carevan a motto of 'It's easier to care than to turn away' in response to that article.

Unfortunately, we had a few setbacks to begin with – I didn't realise there were so many regulations involved in serving food, and even worse, we had a disaster with the van when it was involved in a warehouse fire.

But these setbacks turned out to be blessings in disguise. We were delayed by six months in getting up and running, which gave us

more time to think about how the Carevan would work and to put structures in place that would make it a project with longevity.

The initial idea was to just serve food from the Carevan. But once I started to plan it out properly, I realised I wanted it to create a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of achievement in those less advantaged in our society. I wanted the Carevan to be about giving a little bit of happiness to those doing it tough.

For me, orthodontics is a happy business. Providing a great smile gives the patient self esteem and confidence.

Most of us now have had life changing experiences through the Carevan





So as well as dealing with the pressing need of serving food to those who needed it, we developed the Carevan Sun Smiles concept aimed at reducing dental caries and improving oral hygiene in youth from lower socio-economic families. We also provide ten orthodontic grants a year. So as we're in our second year of the program, we've now got 20 disadvantaged children receiving treatment.

I also wanted the Carevan to make real long-term social change. So we added the Carevan kids cooking and caring program to the mix. With this program, students from local schools elect to cook for the Carevan and then at the end of term they go out and meet the people who the food has been served to. In doing this, the kids learn from the experience and it helps them develop compassion.

This three-pronged approach has resulted in about 800 people volunteering across our five locations in Albury-Wodonga, Wangaratta, Central Coast, Blacktown, and Griffith. We run it like a free franchise – so we help people get the Carevans up and running and then they become their own independent community organisation.

For me, and I believe for many of the volunteers, the joy we get out of this can't be put into words. We're changing not only the lives of the people we're helping, but the lives of the volunteers too.

Most of us now have had life changing experiences through the Carevan.

For me personally, a young boy we helped in one of our locations made me realise the importance of what we do. It's mostly kids who are doing it tough that we see. The kids look forward to us getting there every Wednesday night and providing a bit of company.

I was there one night, packing up the van to go home, when this eight year old boy approached and said 'Baah' behind me. I jumped about a mile high and almost had a third heart attack. I looked around and said, 'how ya going mate?'

The kid said, 'not good' so I asked him why not, to which he replied, 'because you guys are leaving'.

It really made me think, we're obviously needed here; it makes a big impact.

Valued advisor

With running both my orthodontic business and the Carevan, I honestly believe having my NAB Private Client Manager Dennis Maljevac as a friend and advisor has been a vital part in making it all work.

Whenever I have a problem, I call Dennis and he solves it. He frees up my time, so I'm more available to focus on Carevan. Having good management of my personal affairs allows me to progress the work of the foundation. And he's been able to help me expand the orthodontic business and give me the business support I need.

Dennis has been so supportive from the word go with Carevan. Through JBWere's philanthropic services, he helped me get Carevan set up properly so it can eventually be taken Australia wide.

That's the eventual goal of the foundation. I believe the concept has an incredible potential for social change across Australia; it's spread like wildfire so far, so hopefully it'll continue to grow that way in the future.



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