



Des La Rance in 1997 in Fiji, presenting one of the first 10 wheelchairs to a local family

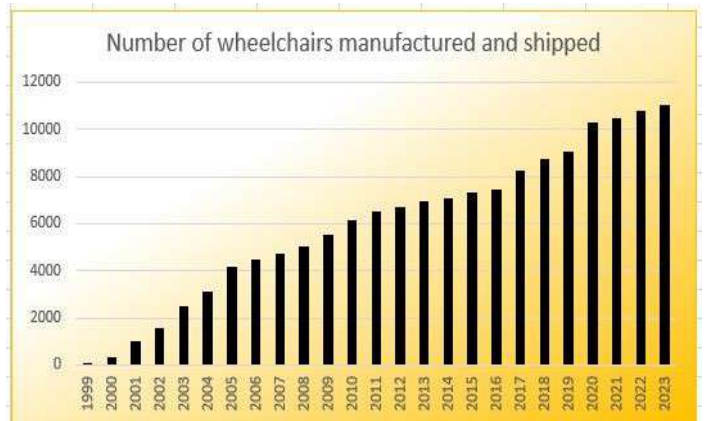
Executive Summary

In the mid 1990's, on a holiday in Fiji, Surfers Sunrise Rotarian Des La Rance OAM noticed the appalling conditions disabled children face in developing countries. A natural inventor and designer, Des decided to address the matter: How to produce a wheelchair that costs little, yet is effective in rough, often muddy terrain? The result: a low cost wheelchair made from marine plywood and repurposed components of discarded bicycles!

Since then, well over ten thousand wheelchairs have been delivered to give disabled children in developing countries the gift of mobility. All labour as well as administration is done by volunteers; there are almost no overheads. In 1997, the first wheelchairs were made for less than \$100 each. **Amazingly, today we still can make one for just \$123**, due to buying components in bulk.

The Wheelchairs Project is not just an International Aid project, it is also a substantial Community Service Project. Every week, a sizeable group of volunteers come in to "get their hands dirty". It allows them to meet regularly, have a good chin wag, whilst simply "doing good". The project involves numerous other Rotary clubs and organizations, even a Correctional Centre.

But the wheelchairs are not the only thing we have been involved in. The devastating tsunamis in Indonesia and Thailand at the end of 2004, and then in Samoa in 2009 generated a real need for school buildings. Surfers Sunrise delivered a school buildings into Phuket, Thailand (2007), followed by a Pre-school for Mata'afa Village (Samoa) and the 'Children's House of Hope', an Orphanage, to Apia in 2014. Four years later, an additional school building was added to the House of Hope. Our current project is an X-Ray Unit next to a hospital in a remote region of Vanuatu. **All work, direct or indirect, is voluntary - no wages, no commissions, no directors fees!**



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Early Beginnings

In the mid 1990's, on a holiday in Fiji, Surfers Sunrise Rotarian Des La Rance OAM noticed the appalling conditions crippled children face in developing countries. A born inventor and designer by nature, he decided to address the matter: How to produce a wheelchair that costs little, yet is effective in rough, often muddy territory? After spending all his spare time for weeks on the design, Des produced the result: a low cost wheelchair made from marine plywood and components of discarded bicycles!



We were able to source a shed at a very low rent, where the design was put into action. Des, together with Ian Mayberry, visited numerous other Rotary clubs on the Gold Coast with the aim of getting interest (read: sponsorship) to manufacture the chairs in volume.

Breakthrough: Channel Nine sponsors first 10 wheelchairs to Fiji



Watched by TV Journalist Linda Rose, Des La Rance makes a final adjustment

The big breakthrough came at the 1997 District 9640 Conference, where our project was on display. 'A Current Affairs' host Ray Martin was a Keynote Speaker, in his capacity as a director of the Fred Hollows Foundation. In August 1997, Channel 9 covered our presentation of the first 10 wheelchairs in Fiji. The subsequent Television exposure, combined with the herculean effort of many Surfers Sunrise club members and Apple Marketing which provided and manned the telephone lines, generated donations of well over \$100,000 in just a few days. Shortly afterwards, our club established a fully registered Charity Organization, "**The Surfers Sunrise Wheelchair Trust**". We were 'on the map', so to speak!

Our much improved financial position allowed our club to expand the scheme to not only make wheelchairs from discarded bicycles, but it became a local Community Service project: we moved into a low rent shed in Ashmore, followed by a sizeable shed provided by the Gold Coast City Council at a low rental, where today one sees volunteers busily working on dismantling bicycles, cutting their frames, cutting and sanding plywood. The design was enhanced to eliminate one of the major issues: flat tyres. We changed to use new BMX wheels with solid inserts instead of rubber tubes.

From 10 to 1,000 to 3,000 to 10,000 Wheelchairs

Other Rotary clubs and even one of the Queensland Correctional Centres are involved in the project whereby they receive a set of components, ready made for enhancement and assembly. They carry out the finish, then return it to us for a final check and shipping. The shipping in turn is arranged by involving third parties and Rotary Clubs. Just to name one example, the



A wheelchair painted by one of the inmates of Palen Creek Correctional Centre. Yes, it is a one-off!

Vietnamese Community in Brisbane arranged for hundreds of our wheelchairs to be shipped to destitute disabled children in their former home country.

Some three years later in 2001, Des La Rance presented the 1,000th wheelchair in Dili (Timor Leste), again covered by Channel 9. In June 2004, our 3,000th wheelchair was presented to a deserving child in Vanuatu. By the end of 2020, over 10,000 wheelchairs have been shipped to developing countries, mostly in the South Pacific and Africa, giving over 10,000 children the gift of mobility. Now, in over 30 underprivileged countries, they no longer need to drag themselves through the dirt, they can participate in their community. Behind the scenes are the efforts of countless men and women, none more dedicated to the job than Daryl Sanderson OAM, who was a very active Chairman of the Wheelchair Trust for 19 years and Bob Harrison who served as Treasurer until 2018.



From left: Des La Rance OAM, Daryl Sanderson OAM and Bob Harrison, who served as Treasurer of the Wheelchair Trust right up to his passing away in 2018.

Expansion to cyclone resistant, flat packed housing and schools



The first prototype 'Flat Pack' House, exhibited at the Rotary International Conference in Brisbane in 2003

being erected in Vanuatu. Regrettably, primarily due to local issues with customs (they made us pay import duty on a donation!), the Vanuatu project did not further evolve.

In 2004, as he accompanied a shipment of our wheelchairs to Timor Leste, Des La Rance met up with a lady who was desperately trying to accommodate dozens of orphans of the East Timor war. She had a bombed out building, but... without a roof. Whilst a local Steel Rolling plant existed, they had no steel. Des quickly drew up plans for steel trusses, then instigated communication with the local Australian Defence Forces Command (InterFET) and ultimately got to discuss the issue personally with (then) Major General Peter Cosgrove, who promptly pulled some strings with BHP. BHP then shipped the steel to Darwin, from where it was loaded onto a barge, brought to Dili, where it was rolled and ultimately was used to make the orphanage liveable. Not meaning to detract from Des' efforts, but having the Rotary brand behind the project certainly would have made it easier by putting the stamp of 'being all above board' behind it.

Schools for Tsunami devastated areas

The tsunami on Boxing Day of 2004 caused widespread devastation in Indonesia and Thailand. In 2006, in



The smiles and sheer effervescence of the happy children on Khao Lak Beach, Thailand, are the true reward for our efforts!



The "Class of 2006" - some of the Surfers Sunrise building force of the school on Khao Lak Beach; Des La Rance front right.

During his travels abroad, Des also perceived another need: the lack of accommodation for disabled children. The Surfers Sunrise Wheelchairs project was expanded to include housing for orphans and school buildings. The strategy was to design a construction which could be fully pre-manufactured in Australia, shipped in standard shipping containers and swiftly re-erected on site at the destination. It had to be low cost, easy to manufacture, suitable for flat pack shipping, suitable for tropical climates... and cyclone proof! Des came up with a design to build a low-cost, cyclone proof house for a family of up to seven people. A prototype was exhibited at the Rotary International Conference in Brisbane, in 2003, before

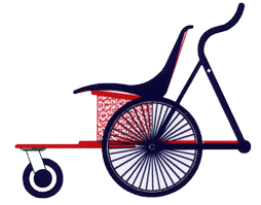


The completed Preschool on Khao Lak Beach, Thailand, to house homeless children whose parents were affected by the tsunami on Boxing Day of 2004

cooperation with a Thai Royal Princess to facilitate dealings with the local authorities and the Thai Navy to provide man power, about a dozen members and helpers of Surfers Sunrise went over to Phuket to erect a Primary School building, together with a Play Gym on Thai Navy grounds on Khao Lak Beach, in the Phuket region.

Just a few years later, another tsunami devastated large areas of Samoa in 2009. Whilst the local

authorities rebuilt schools, no provision was made for pre-schools. This prompted us to manufacture a pre-school building to be despatched and erected, together with a Play Gym, in the Matafa'a Village, southern Samoa. Added to the building was also a large Water storage tank.



Fundraising for these projects came from a wide variety of sources, but it is important that we acknowledge the very generous donations by an individual philanthropist who wishes to remain anonymous.

Three years later, the largest project ever undertaken by the Surfers Sunrise Rotary, the House of Hope, was commenced. "Officially" it was to be an orphanage, but in real terms it was to accommodate up to 32 orphaned, abandoned and/or abused children in Samoa's capital, Apia. The project came to fruition in the second half of 2012. The entire building was pre-manufactured at our Project Shed, packed into four 40' containers and shipped. On site, the containers actually became part of the construction.

Again, a play gym was included. Further, one of our members with deep knowledge in electronics and communications donated equipment and know-how to set up a video link to the local court house. This avoids the children having to face the accuser in court.

In 2018, we added an additional school building to the House of Hope. Again, the entire building was pre-manufactured, flat packed into shipping containers, which again became part of the structure when assembled and erected on site.

Fundraising and assistance by third parties

The club has continually expended serious efforts to raise funds to finance the projects. Throughout the past two decades, Apple Marketing has year on year helped to raise thousands of dollars every year. The major building projects all received partial finance by



Des La Rance constructed a scale model of the Pre-school building for Matafa'a Village on Samoa. Designed to be flat packed into a shipping container! Below: the building is almost completed.



The House of Hope in Apia, Samoa, under Construction. The entire building was pre-manufactured and test assembled at our Project Shed in Arundel, then flat packed into 4 shipping containers, which ultimately became part of the overall structure, with the doors and windows cut out (picture above right). Picture left: view from the inside; the frame is up. Yes! It is cyclone proof too!



the Rotary Australia World Community Service (RAWCS) organization with so-called 'Matching Grants'. In all the Samoan projects, we had the assistance of the local Samoa Victims Support Group (SVSG) to assist with the local authorities. Locally, we enjoyed the support of multiple High Schools, including Helensvale High School, A B Paterson College and the Northern Collegiate of High Schools, where the students not only raised funds, but also assisted on site with fundraising and with assistance in the on-site in the construction. In all the major projects, we enjoyed major contributions by Philanthropists, who wish to remain unnamed.

Where to from here?

Well, the production of low-cost wheelchairs from discarded bicycles of course continues. Our current major project, expected to be completed by end of 2023, is to add an **X-Ray Unit to an existing hospital on Pentecost Island** in the north of Vanuatu.

"Side Benefits"

And on the home front? Truly galvanizing: This is as much a Community Service project as much as an International Aid project.

Over the years, the Surfers Sunrise Wheelchair Project has won numerous recognitions, including the



Let me assure you, they don't always sit around!
Some of our volunteers at morning tea at the Project Shed. Des La Rance in white T-Shirt.



The completed House of Hope (left), during the construction phase, the locals entertained our members and builders with a dance.

Below: Stage 2 of the House of Hope - Surfers Sunrise workers take a well earned break during construction of the second building, an additional class room.



District's International Service Award, the Community Service Award, Best Multi Club Project, and the most coveted of all, the District's Significant Achievement Award - multiple times!

Our volunteers truly enjoy the opportunity to "get their hands dirty" at our Project Shed, "to do good" while they have a good ol' yarn. The inmates of the Palen Creek Correctional Centre are not only doing something worthwhile, they are learning skills which will assist them to re-connect with the community.

Throughout Australia, Rotary volunteers are working towards making the world a better place.



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