



# Rotary District 9705: Vulnerable Youth Project



## The Concept

The Rotary Clubs of District 9705 are driven to support youths who are at risk or currently experiencing homelessness in the ACT and Southern NSW. Through a relationship with Uniting Communities in South Australia, Rotarians have embraced the concept of *Ruby's*, which has proven for over 28 years to help families stay together and providing young people a safe and secure place to live.

Ruby's is a unique Australian program that provides young people aged 12-to-17 years with a dedicated home environment, while also working with the parents to reunite the family through the ongoing support of social workers and allied health professionals. Most referrals to Ruby's come from parents, as well as police and other Government service providers. Through this program, up to 80% of young people return to live with their families full-time.

Ruby's has been designated as the Rotary District 9705 Vulnerable Youth project by District Governor Michael Moore and has been launched as part of Rotary's Centenary in Australia in 2021.

## The Current Problem

The biggest gap in social services across the country is finding accommodation for youths who find themselves without a roof over their head. In a 2019 Youth Survey Report, Mission Australia found one in six young people aged 15-to-19 years have been homeless at some stage in their lives. Every week, police pick up youth who require assistance and finding appropriate accommodation for them is extremely challenging, reporting this as one of their greatest problems.

Youth homelessness is due to several factors, including:

- \* Dysfunctional family environment,
- \* Abuse at home, both physical and sexual,
- \* Family violence,
- \* Young people's use of alcohol and drugs, or simply
- \* A complete break-down of communication within the family unit.

Ruby's acts as a circuit breaker, allowing dysfunctional families to have time apart as tension and other problems emerge.

## A Typical Ruby's Home

Ruby's homes are normal suburban properties that are well-presented and without any indication they are housing young people seeking a safe and secure home.

- \* Each home has between six and eight bedrooms
- \* Is staffed 24/7 by youth workers on shifts
- \* Ruby's 'bedroom roster' sees around 13 teenagers staying each week
- \* Ruby's aim is to never have an empty bed
- \* Ruby's work with the families and carers of these youths
- \* Each young person may spend a few nights a week at Ruby's and the rest at home
- \* The average length of stay at Ruby's is six months
- \* Other allied health services provide ongoing support
- \* These homes are located geographically near public transport/schools
- \* Young people must attend school

- \* Teenagers in the home cook, clean and wash
- \* The focus is establishing a genuine home environment
- \* Where up to 80% of these young people eventually return to their home the other 20% enter youth protection or disconnect with the program
- \* Research shows youths living on the streets move in and out of homelessness for life

## Government Involvement

The first Ruby's home in the District has been brokered by the Rotary Club of Canberra. The ACT Minister for Community Services approved the refurbishment of a Government owned eight-bedroom property, with additional social worker accommodation, in the Canberra suburb of Waramanga.

Additional homes for vulnerable youth are proposed in the District and in each case the ACT/NSW Government will tender out the running of each facility to a specialist service provider such as Vinnies or the Salvation Army. This service provider must then be accredited by Ruby's South Australia to manage the home under Ruby's proven model and guidance.

## What Rotary's local commitment includes

Rotary does not have ownership of any home or play a part in running the facility. However what Rotary does do is as follows:

- \* Act as a sounding board on the selection and design of each home
- \* Provide some assistance with refurbishment
- \* Identify funding sources: local Rotary Club donations, philanthropic contributions, and grant money from various sources
- \* Any Rotary Club's financial commitment to each home will be capped by negotiation.
- \* Become a member of a local working committee to oversee Rotary's ongoing financial or voluntary involvement (such as gardening) if required, in association with the service provider.

Depending on the location, each project is branded a Rotary initiative in association with local Councils and the NSW or ACT Governments, Ruby's, and the chosen service provider.

## Rotary's Governance of the Project

A Rotary District 9705 financial entity handles all financial arrangements and contributions to the Vulnerable Youth Project. A representative Governance Board of Rotary District 9705 members oversees the rollout of these services across the District. This Board is appointed by the serving District Governor.

### Rotary District 9705 Governance Board

**Dr David Marshall AM,**  
Chair, Past President RC Berri South Australia, and Paul Harris Fellow (PHF)

**Rosemary Everett,**  
Treasurer and Public Officer, District Treasurer, PHF

**Alan Scandrett,**  
Past President RC of Canberra, and Project Committee member, PHF

**George Weston,**  
Past District Governor 9700, PHF

**Georgie Le Couteur,**  
Past President RC of Tuggeranong, Legal Aid Lawyer, and PHF

**Emma Bell,**  
Member RC of Hall, and Communications Expert, PHF

**President, Rotary Club of Canberra**  
(Currently Desmond Woods, PHF)

### Observers at Governance Board Meetings

**Sandra Turner,**  
Incoming President RC of Canberra (July 2021)

**Michael Moore,**  
Current District Governor District 9705

**Leo Farrelly,**  
Incoming District Governor District 9705

## Contact

Dr David Marshall AM PHF is Chair of the Rotary D9705 Inc. Vulnerable Youth Project. He can be contacted on

**Mobile:** 0418 631 780 or  
**email:** [david@train.net.au](mailto:david@train.net.au)