

## Catholic Diocese of Ballarat donation to Future Shapers accelerates sleepbus vision

An innovative solution to tackle the region's homelessness crisis will become a reality sooner than anticipated after a generous donation by a much loved community group. Recently, the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat pledged \$50,000 to efforts towards the Future Shapers sleepbus proposal.



The sleepbus, which has already seen success in Maroochydore, Melbourne and Sydney, could help house a minimum of twenty rough sleepers in the region. It is anticipated to contain twenty partially sound proofed pods, with each room being fitted with a television broadcasting free-to-air programs as well as a separate channel dedicated to airing the details of relevant welfare services in the area.

Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Business Manager, Andrew Jirik (pictured third from the left above), said he felt compelled to make the donation after hearing about the idea from various media outlets and realising it aligned with his

organisation's ethos. "I saw the article in The Courier and I heard something on the ABC and it was just a project I knew we could help with," Mr Jirik said. "It complements what we do in our social services arm and social housing space but this is much more immediate and I saw that we could help with some funds and actually make it happen. So it was a good fit for us."

gforce employment and recruitment apprenticeship and traineeship consultant Joeline Rayment, who forms part of this year's Future Shapers cohort, said her group was in utter "shock" by the diocese's selfless contribution. "We follow up on all avenues and there's always that hope there but the support of the value of \$50,000 is amazing," Ms Rayment said.

"It means we get a bus but more than that it means that we have the support of organisations and groups in Ballarat, who have been long standing parts of Ballarat, and who see the value in this as well." Ms Rayment said the donation has now allowed the Future Shapers to reach nearly three quarters of their \$100,000 target. "We're really close; we're over the halfway point. We're up to about \$70,000 and we should have the building (of the sleepbus) start in late January," she said.

"We just need the last of the funds to make sure that it doesn't get hindered." She said if all went to plan Ballarat could see the bus out on the streets as early as May next year. However, Ms Rayment said the Future Shapers were not going to stop at one bus having ambitions to advocate for more in Ballarat to cater for the region's most marginalised groups.

"One bus isn't the end. Not only are we wanting to sustain the bus and keep it running, we also want to then go for a pink sleepbus for women and kids," she said. For those interested in donating to the Future Shapers fundraising campaign visit <https://www.sleepbus.org/fundraisers/homelessnesscentralhighlands>

*Article courtesy of the Ballarat Courier, text by Malvika Hemanth and picture by Lachlan Bence*