

# Our region, our people



George Mudford is passionate about tackling the problem of homelessness. Picture: MEAGAN MCGREGOR

## Home's where the river is

MEAGAN MCGREGOR

GEORGE Mudford has travelled Australia during his social work career, but having settled into the next stage of his life it's the Mallee community that will benefit from his commitment to helping others.

Born and raised in Mildura, George attributes his strong sense of community service to his parents.

"Mum came from a welfare and nursing background and dad also worked at a hospital as a porter," he said.

"But before that, my grandfather had a long connection with the Robinvale Hospital, helping to establish it.

"Later he was made a life governor of the hospital, so I would say caring and social justice has very much been a part of my upbringing."

George grew up in the public housing system and at the age of 18 became the first member in his family to ever attend university.

Studying both a Bachelor of Social Work and a Bachelor of the Arts in Albury, his passion for helping others was recognised early.

While he was still at university, a local refuge centre offered him a job and just two years later he was managing the centre.

Through that experience George discovered his passion for working on social issues at a "bigger picture" level.

"I am interested in making positive changes at a system level," he said.

"Taking the role as manager allowed me to develop my skills and I decided to focus my work there."

After completing his studies George was offered a role in Syd-

ney at the New South Wales Youth Homelessness peak body where he spent five years focused on advocacy, policy and research.

During this time in the Harbour City, he helped establish a youth homeless service and worked on the inaugural National Homelessness Plan, where he met with then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd.

Through his work in Sydney George furthered his knowledge in the homelessness sector and still cites it as a strong area of interest.

"I believe every person has the right to a home," he said.

"If people don't have safe and secure housing it becomes difficult to get ahead in life.

"It is much harder to prosper and reach your potential when you're battling the uncertainty of being homeless."

George's next career venture led him from the hustle of Sydney's city life to the alternative and relaxed lifestyle of Byron Bay, where he spent five years managing a youth organisation.

The change opened him up to a completely different way of life — a long way both geographically and culturally from his Mallee upbringing — but it allowed him to further expand his experience and knowledge of the housing sector.

"It was a great experience but it also came with some unique challenges," he said.

"I always try to look at every situation as a chance to build on my own knowledge and Byron Bay offered that."

Despite enjoying the beach lifestyle, he found himself yearning for the Mallee and a chance to be closer to family.

He took a break from work and used the time to travel to New Zea-

land before returning home to Mildura with a car full of possessions.

Ironically finding himself homeless, George moved back in with his parents while he reset his compass for the next stage of his life.

Following a short break George accepted the role as general manager with Mallee Family Care Swan Hill where he currently oversees operations across the Southern Mallee and manages settlement, homelessness and early year's services.

**“It is much harder to prosper and reach your potential when you're battling the uncertainty of being homeless”**

**GEORGE MUDFORD**

He remains passionate about working towards safe and secure housing for everyone.

"The job's not done until we end homelessness," he said.

"We are working towards an inclusive community where people have the opportunity to reach their potential.

"Nearly 50 per cent of homeless people are aged under 25.

"We know that homelessness is greatly linked to exposure to family violence and people who have been institutionalised in their childhood.

"It's not just a city problem — it's happening in regional areas too.

"But it can often be a hidden problem.

"It's not just the visible homelessness you see on city streets, it's couch-surfing and young people

being forced to stay in unsafe situations because they need a place to stay.

"It's also unsecured tenancies where people do not have a lease agreement or where they are living in substandard housing conditions."

Not content to serve the community just in working hours, he recently registered to compete in his first half marathon (21 kilometres) on October 15.

George has set a fundraising goal of \$750 and plans to donate that to the Chances for Children Program.

"Running has long been a passion and a release for me, and the opportunity to raise money for local children was a great motivator," he said.

Chances for Children is focused on providing financial support and mentoring to children who without help may not have the opportunity to pursue their education or talents in sport or the arts.

On a personal level, he loves his life in Swan Hill and can foresee a long future here.

He is currently studying again, this time a Business degree.

"I love the community spirit of Swan Hill," he said.

"It really is a caring town and I think that's what makes it amazing."

Despite a life of travel it is still the river that draws him back to the region and reminds him he is home.

"I loved the beach at Byron but I have always felt a strong connection to the Murray River and always felt drawn to come back to it," he said.

To support George's fundraising effort search his name at [run.gofundraise.com.au](http://run.gofundraise.com.au)