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Tenacious volunteer honoured for helping thousands of Hunter and Central Coast children in need

Eight years, almost 24,000 children and over 645,000 donated items – that’s the impact of Derryck Klarkowski, who been awarded the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation’s Chairman’s Medal for his service to children living in poverty through his charity, We Care Connect.

Established in Wyong in 2016, We Care Connect is a volunteer-led organisation that distributes quality items for children and essential goods to families in need.

Through the generosity of its volunteers and community donations, We Care Connect supplies everything from clothes and bedroom items to school supplies and birthday presents to thousands of children and families each year. Those supported include children experiencing financial disadvantage, family violence, chronic medical conditions, or are at risk of homelessness.

Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation’s newly appointed chair, Catherine Robson, said it was fitting Derryck was being recognised during National Volunteer Week.

“Derryck is known at We Care Connect as a volunteer CEO who leads from the ground up, tackling any job that needs doing including packing donations, repairing furniture and maintaining the warehouse, regularly dedicating five to seven days a week to the cause,” Ms Robson said.

“Through the hard work of Derryck and his team, We Care Connect has now expanded to the Hunter and sees 120 volunteers across two sites collaborate with 300 case workers from 100 social support agencies.

“The number of children who are better off thanks to the support of We Care Connect is amazing, but there is a phenomenal impact that you can’t quantify – restoring safety, dignity and self-worth to these kids and their families.

“Derryk remains at the heart of everything achieved by We Care Connect, and it has been our privilege at the Foundation to be along for part of this ride.”

For Derryck, co-founding We Care Connect was a retirement project that embraced his passion for volunteering and supporting people in need.

As a medical laboratory scientist by profession, Derryck’s special interest in immunohaematology, tropical medicine and viral infections took him to developing nations with Médecins San Frontières, while he also spent two years as a volunteer in Eritrea. He managed all this while also leading with the Venturer Scouts and serving with the Rural Fire Service when on home soil.

“It’s very humbling to receive this acknowledgement,” Mr Klarowski said.

Media release

“Whilst I am the volunteer with the official CEO title, this award really is a reflection of the incredible contribution that all of the We Care volunteers past and present have given.”

We Care Connect team member Helen Barker said that Derryck inspires countless others to give.

“Every person who’s lucky enough to meet or volunteer with Derryck is humbled and in awe of this community movement he’s created,” Ms Barker said.

“He shares his vision and wisdom with a grace and generosity that, without a doubt, is making a tangible impact to alleviate the unthinkable struggles for children living in poverty.”

About the Chairman's Medal

First presented in honour of former Foundation Chairman, Michael Slater, who spent more than 50 years volunteering his time and talents to local organisations, the Medal is recognition for an outstanding volunteer who sets aside their own priorities to better the community.

The Medal is presented annually to a volunteer from a charity that has previously received funding from the Foundation as well as a \$5,000 cash grant to the volunteer’s charitable organisation to be used for volunteer development.

About Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation

Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation provides more than \$1 million in grants each year to charitable projects aimed at improving the health and social wellbeing of vulnerable people in regional New South Wales. Since its establishment in 2003, the Foundation has provided more than \$26 million to some 550 community initiatives.

We Care Connect has previously received \$118,000 from the Foundation to establish its Thornton warehouse and purchase a new vehicle.