



The CALEDONIA
Foundation



The Oasis: Australia's Homeless Youth Return on Social Capital

Documentary filmmaking as a tool for social change is relatively new to Australia – with philanthropic foundations traditionally reluctant to fund in this area. *The Oasis* demonstrated the latent power of documentary film to deliver a high return on social capital. One year after its initial screening and live panel discussion on ABC Television in April 2008, we continue to measure its enduring impact.

The partnership with ABC Television was teamed with two major initiatives funded by the Caledonia Foundation: 1) the National Youth Commission (NYC) Report on Youth Homelessness; and 2) a comprehensive education and outreach campaign.

The NYC Report was the result of an independent, national inquiry which informed the range of evidence-based recommendations. In 2007, the NYC held 21 days of hearings in all states and territories. Formal evidence was given by 319 individuals and 91 written submissions were received, including seven from government departments. The NYC report in 2008 provided context and credibility to images presented by the documentary, that the experience of *The Oasis* youth was representative of a greater problem, not an isolated case.

The education and outreach campaign based on *The Oasis* documentary was designed to combine grassroots support to vulnerable young people, with the possibility of effecting long-lasting social change. In 2008, all Australian secondary schools and philanthropic foundations were provided with *The Oasis* DVD, comprehensive Study Guide and a copy of the NYC Report.

In addition, packages were sent to the CEO's of Australia's top 100 companies, 200 state and federal parliamentarians and 1,000 DVDs were distributed to the Salvation Army network across Australia and 10,000 distributed during Carols in the Domain, Sydney, 2008.

Each component of the strategy was designed to draw attention to the plight of homeless youth and act as a catalyst for change.

Direct impact

- > **1.1 million+ audience** on ABC television across the five city and regional markets
- > **8 million+ TV viewers** exposed to the issue of youth homelessness during National Youth Week, 2008
- > **876,000 audience** on ABC TV for *The Oasis: Australian's Homeless Youth Discussion* with Tony Jones
- > **Every secondary school in Australia** supplied with *The Oasis* DVD and education kit
- > **2000+** participants in ABC online forum

Attributable impact

- > Salvation Army **Red Shield Door Knock Appeal** ↑ 10.5% to **\$8.8m**
- > **More than \$1.3m in new donations** to The Oasis Youth Support Network in Surry Hills from philanthropic foundations, corporate entities and individuals.
- > Significant increase in donations from existing donors to Oasis Youth Support Network
- > Federal Government established **target to halve homelessness by 2020 and provide an additional \$1.2b over four years**



“One of the best resources we
have used”

Teacher Survey response
November 2008

Education and Outreach

- > *The Oasis* documentary, report and study guide distributed to every secondary school in Australia; CEO's of Australia's top 100 companies; 200 key State and Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers; and over 300 philanthropic Foundations.
- > 1,000 DVDs distributed to the Salvation Army network across Australia.
- > 10,000 copies of *The Oasis* distributed at Carols in the Domain, Sydney 2008, raising \$105,000.
- > *The Oasis* documentary used as a resource for Social Justice classes, PDHPE, Society & Environment, Religion & Society, Media Studies, Value Education, Community Development Studies.
- > Schools survey: 70% of teachers surveyed showed the whole 88 minute documentary, 68% used the study guide.

The study guides aimed to provide the framework for thought-provoking lessons and class discussion. *The Oasis* website (www.theoasismovie.com.au) was designed to be a complementary teaching resource with information and features 18 short films, extracts and useful links.

The Oasis documentary and study guides inspired a number of fundraising and volunteer initiatives driven by school involvement across Australia including fundraisers, soup kitchens, donation of pens and books for street schools and appeals for swags for the homeless. Activities initiated by secondary school students included:

- > Sydney Bridge Run (including Scots College and many other Sydney schools) raised \$38,000
- > Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar School (VIC): Year 12 students held a benefit concert entitled *Kids Under Cover* raised \$45,000
- > Fintona Girls School (VIC) coordinated a "Sleep Out" event

A number of schools also used *The Oasis* as a starting point for special projects on homelessness, including students at St Josephs College and Scots College who created their own mini-documentary based on the issue.

“My students were low ability and generally disengaged with most texts presented to them. They were absolutely engrossed in *The Oasis* and for some time it has changed their attitude towards young people in crisis – seeing a lot of parallels with their own lives.”

Teacher Survey response
November 2008



"[The Oasis]... will give an opportunity for Australians to put a face to the statistics, particularly the faces of Owen, Emma, Trent, Haley, Darren, Beau and Chris, the seven young people at the centre of the show."

Julia Gillard, MP
Deputy Prime Minister
Speech to ACOSS National Conference,
April 2008

Political awareness

- > Youth homelessness back on the national policy agenda.
- > National Youth Commission (NYC) recommendations adopted within Government White Paper on Homelessness.
- > Federal Government announced commitment to halve homelessness by 2020 as well as providing an additional \$1.2 billion over four years.
- > NYC Report launched during Youth Week 2008 by Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Housing.
- > Acknowledgement of the Oasis youth in Federal Parliament by both Government Ministers and the Leader of the Opposition.
- > Education and outreach program launched by Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Housing at Parliament House, Canberra alongside screening of *The Oasis*.
- > Hundreds of articles in key metropolitan and regional newspapers and specialist coverage in journals such as Big Issue.

The Oasis documentary and the NYC Report generated hundreds of reports on radio, television and print media. It is estimated that television coverage on the issue of youth homelessness across all networks reached more than 8 million Australians. The Channel 9 Today Show promoted the ABC screening and promoted dialogue on the issue of youth homelessness over four consecutive days with guests such as Captain Paul Moulds invited to speak about the issue.

The Oasis captured the attention of senior bureaucrats and ministers across Australia including Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard and Minister for Housing, Tanya Plibersek, each of whom referenced *The Oasis* in public communications.

The Federal Government addressed the issue of youth homelessness in its White Paper on Homelessness, *The Road Home*, released in December 2008. The Federal Government White Paper has been well received by key advocacy groups, service providers and practitioners in the homelessness sector.

The Federal Government White Paper provides an additional \$1.2 billion over four years, comprising \$800 million commitment for new support services for homeless people and \$400 million for social housing, to house the homeless.

"...a fabulous documentary that I know many members of the House would have watched and been very moved by."

Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Housing
Speech to the House of Representatives
Parliament House, Canberra
May 2008



"The stories of these kids like Owen, Hayley, Darren and Trent and his girlfriend have been an amazing reality check...I wanted to thank you for showing such an amazing film. It really hit home."

Shanae from Victoria (16 years old)
Extract from email to Paul Moulds
April 2008

Community Impact

- > Reunion of young people with their parents as a result of *The Oasis* documentary.
- > An attitude shift and greater understanding in the local community towards the Oasis Youth Centre in Surry Hills.
- > Employment opportunities offered to homeless youth: eg. Mirvac, Woolworths and Property Industry Foundation.
- > 10.5% increase in Red Shield Door Knock Appeal: \$8.8 million in donations in 2008.
- > Public interest created by critical mass resulting in increased philanthropic and corporate donations to the Oasis Youth Support Network.

The Oasis documentary, the NYC report, outreach strategy and education kits contributed to a groundswell of activity in support of the broader issue of youth homelessness and the Oasis Support Network. The sheer volume and range of contact and commentary, including thousands of emails, letters, conversations and telephone calls provides some insight to the impact of *The Oasis* documentary on the broader community.

The diversity of the feedback also demonstrated the reach of *The Oasis*. The documentary had captured the attention of mums and dads, politicians and young people, including those who had once stayed at the Oasis Youth Refuge, but are now in jobs, in stable housing, and/or with families.

New voices, new perspectives

As part of the media component of the outreach campaign the young people supported by Oasis received formal media coaching. The coaching was designed to arm them with skills to deal with media and to attend to our duty-of-care to a group of vulnerable young people whose lives were being thrust into the spotlight. This gave *The Oasis* youth an unprecedented opportunity to be the 'experts' on youth homelessness.

The Oasis also served as a platform for many individual youth homelessness services and organisations right across the country to be heard.

"Robbin and I have been overwhelmed and enormously humbled by the reaction to the documentary. So many people have stopped us on the street, emailed us, rang us, messaged us, wrote to us and encouraged us. So many have indicated that their attitude has changed. Even locals who misunderstood and opposed us have told us they now know what we are trying to achieve and do. Every Salvation Army centre across Australia is reporting increased giving from the public. I sense we have changed the nation."

Captain Paul Moulds,
Director, The Oasis Youth Support Network.



“The fact that the documentary was not a “one off” is commendable...you have impacted the present and the future with your ongoing commitment.”

Commissioner Linda Bond, Territorial Commander, Eastern Territory, Salvation Army.

Philanthropic support

The Salvation Army services across Australia benefitted significantly from increased financial contributions following the screening of *The Oasis*. Media and anecdotal reports indicated that other community based youth services also received substantial publicity and financial support due to greater community awareness of the issue and willingness to support services in their local area.

The Oasis Youth Support Network in Surry Hills, Sydney continues to receive extraordinary corporate and philanthropic support. The experience of Oasis in Sydney provides an indication of how Australians were moved to respond to the issue nationally.

The Oasis Youth Support Network in Surry Hills, Sydney continues to receive unprecedented corporate and philanthropic support. This provides an indicative measure of how Australians were moved to respond to the issue nationally:

- > Nokia renewed its commitment to provide \$100,000 each year to run the StreetConnect van.
- > Oasis Ball 2008 achieved record fundraising: \$247,000
- > Carols in the Domain Sydney, record fundraising: \$105,000
- > Societe Generale donated \$160,000 over two years which allowed five new beds to be opened at the Oasis Youth Refuge Surry Hills.
- > Commonwealth Bank Capital Markets Ball raised \$100,000
- > Christian City Church donated \$80,000
- > Mirvac donated \$20,000 to renovate a House for 8 homeless youth provided by Oasis.
- > Deni Hines & Christine Anu recorded a song for Oasis “Taking it to the Streets” with percentage of proceeds to the Oasis Youth Support Network.
- > Boost Mobile donated \$20,000
- > Blackmores Sydney Running Festival Oasis team (schools): \$38,000
- > Video Ezy donated \$176,250 in 2009

Other new donations received by The Oasis Support Network, Surry Hills between July 2008 and March 2009:

- > Corporate donations: \$110,450
- > Private Trusts and Foundations donations: \$355,400
- > Individual contributions: \$168,000 compared to \$68,000 received in FY2008.

The Oasis Youth Support Network in Surry Hills directly received more than **\$1.3 million** in new donations from philanthropic foundations, corporate donors and individuals between April 2008 and March 2009*

*This figure does not include the increase in donations as a result of the documentary from existing donors or functions (eg. Carols in the Domain, Door Knock Appeal or the Oasis Ball) or increase in donations received by the Salvation Army nationally.



“The Caledonia Foundation has been courageous and effective, and have really given sophisticated advocacy in a vital sector an enormous boost.”

Rhonda Galbally AO
CEO, Our Community

Enduring legacy

More than twelve months after the screening of the documentary on ABC Television, *The Oasis* has demonstrated its enduring impact. In addition to increased financial support, the following initiatives scheduled for 2009 include:

- > The Foxtel Foundation film, music and media training for youth from the Oasis Support Network. Their short films were launched in March 2009.
- > Video Ezy stores national distribution of *The Oasis* DVD as a free overnight rental (from April 2009).
- > The Salvation Army plan to launch a major public awareness campaign on youth homelessness in June 2009.
- > NSW Forum on Homelessness to feature short films from *The Oasis* in August 2009.
- > National Oasis Short Film Competition to target schools and youth groups in 2009-10.

The Oasis has facilitated greater recognition and engagement with the work of the Salvation Army and Captain Paul Moulds from the Oasis Youth Support Network. In 2008, Paul was named a finalist for Australian of the Year NSW and the Local Hero Award; and featured in the Sydney Magazine's 100 most influential Australians issue. Since the ABC's screening of the documentary, Paul has had numerous opportunities to speak at high profile events on the subject of youth homelessness.

The documentary and community response prompted significant changes to the Salvation Army's strategy and response to the issue of youth homelessness. Initiatives included the formation of a National Youth Network and the re-badging of all its existing youth services under the name Oasis. A National Youth Foundation has also been launched to raise funds designated for the growth and strengthening of youth services throughout Australia. Youth homelessness is now a key social justice issue for The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army is re-emphasising its commitment to advocate strongly for homeless young people and to keep this issue before the Australian public. Plans are well advanced to launch a major public awareness campaign on youth homelessness in June 2009. The campaign has been made possible by pro bono support from a leading advertising agency whose executives watched *The Oasis* documentary and were inspired to help.

Conclusion

The screening of *The Oasis* documentary on ABC Television, NYC Report and outreach activities have had an indelible impact on the Australian community. Each time we speak to Paul Moulds we are heartened by new stories that demonstrate the impact of *The Oasis* as it continues to find new audiences through the distribution of DVDs and community screenings – both nationally and internationally. The challenge now is to harness the momentum of community and political support for the cause of youth homelessness to ensure that the Federal Government's 2020 target is reached.

The Caledonia Foundation will continue to support initiatives related to *The Oasis* project to ensure that youth homelessness remains on the national agenda.



International Screenings

- Santa Barbara International Film Festival: Nominee – Social Justice Award for Documentary Film 2008
- 6ème Festival International du Film Documentaire Océanien: Prix Spécial du Jury 2008
- St Tropez Cinema des Antipodes 2008
- OzFlix Canada, Australian Film Weekend 2009
- Barbican London Australian Film Festival, 2009