

## Chiropractic Helps Street Kids in Sydney

Editorial Staff

Everyone likes to be touched -- but gentle touching is so new to many of these people, said Geoff Irvine, D.C. of Sydney, Australia. He was speaking of the Wayside Chapel that houses a health center and treats the street people around Kings Cross, Sydney's red-light district. The health center is staffed by volunteers, including the center's founder, Dr. Irvine.

The clinic has a bright, cheerful atmosphere which is a marked contrast to the Kings Cross world of strip clubs, teenage prostitutes, and drug pushers. "It's a drug free alternative in a very drug oriented environment," said Dr. Irvine.

The clinic provides low cost treatment -- \$5.00 a session, but free to those with no money -- for street people, pensioners, welfare recipients, and other low income earners. Along with a natural, health-oriented GP, a homeopath, two acupuncturists, and seven DCs work there one afternoon per week.

A wide spectrum of patients seek treatment. Many have suffered severe hardships. Some are drug addicts, ex-prisoners or schizophrenics. There are young street kids who live in squats and bins, or sleep in the street. They are largely on their own and have no one to look after them.

"Sure," said Dr. Irvine, "some are middle-class kids rebelling against authority or wealthy parents, but they're in the minority -- most of the kids have escaped abusive homes and situations."

Dr. Irvine established and runs the clinic with his wife Kit as the administrative force. He first thought of such a place for Sydney in 1988 when he heard that several chiropractic students had embarked on a similar venture in Melbourne's Salvation Army Sacred Heart Center.

"Getting it off the ground wasn't easy," he said, but after many negotiations and frustrations, particularly in finding a suitable venue, the Wayside Chapel secured a room. With volunteers from the community, and other chiropractors, the room was refurbished. Donations of paint, carpet, and many services, as well as the all-important tables from the Sydney College of Chiropractic, made the program a reality. Initially the center was operated only by chiropractors, but the idea snowballed and other types of practitioners joined in.

While recognizing that many people in Kings Cross are well beyond any help the center can provide, Dr. Irvine says that it achieves a lot and he finds the work there rewarding. He speaks of the "good news" stories: a young, unmarried mother and ex-heroin addict who now works at the center as a voluntary receptionist and is studying toward university entrance for a social work degree; a 17-year-old boy paralyzed and suffering a speech impediment, who under chiropractic care has, according to Dr. Irvine, now begun to get around very well and is trying to help a friend kick the heroine habit. "Chiropractic seems to have somehow tapped the young boy's nurturing instincts," said Dr. Irvine.

Future plans for the Wayside Chapel clinic include shower and laundry facilities for street kids: to help

them look presentable for job interviews. It is only an initial step for them, but a least it would be a step in the right direction.

FEBRUARY 1993