

# Hands on Health



After graduating from chiropractics in 1987, Dein Vindigni ventured to India with a Community Aid Abroad study tour to see what he could offer. During his visit, he met a group of volunteers who cared for many of Howrah Railway Station's derelict children in Calcutta. The organisation had managed to persuade a team of doctors and nurses to set up practice at the station. After this experience, Dein felt inspired to return to Australia and start a clinic in Melbourne for the needy. He founded Hands on Health Australia (HOHA) from this vision and recently won the Order of Australia Medal 2008 for his twenty-one years of humanitarian work.



At the age of twelve Dein was introduced to Mother Theresa who was visiting the Missionaries of Charity with his mother. She said 'come to India and visit sometime'. Having corresponded with her during his teenage years, Dein finally made it to Calcutta at twenty-four and visited Mother Theresa with a six-week Community Aid Abroad tour. Among the sixteen people visiting the project was his future wife Catherine.

The tour connected Dein and Catherine with Moira Kelly who was volunteering with the Brothers of Charity at Calcutta's Howrah railway station. The station provided refuge for over 60,000 people in and around the area. Moira located sick and disabled children, finding medical provisions, healthcare, housing and meals with the help of other volunteers. She also encouraged local doctors and bank managers to support the project, helping those with debt and financial problems.

Moira had spent time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta in the 1980s working with the poorest of the poor. For the

past twenty years her mission has been the rescue and recovery of children orphaned, maimed or traumatised by war, neglect, abuse, poverty or political turmoil especially in the combat zones of Asia and Europe.

Another inspiration was an Indian man named Satish who left a well paying job to live with the Harijans (untouchables). In the Harijan caste, the families are left to pay the debt of the dead. Satish organised a cooperative to collectively plant crops helping empower the community. 'Satish would say it was better to light a candle than to complain about the dark', Dein remembers.

Both Moira and Satish inspired Dein and Catherine to initiate a project of their own. After meeting an Indigenous Australian there, they were reminded of the same issues surrounding Aboriginal communities. They then felt compelled to start a project in their own country and returned to Australia with a sense of urgency before starting Hands on Health. 'It was a spiritual prompting', Dein says.

Their first goal was to find a place



to set up a clinic. Dein went to church groups looking for the right venue, only to find people suspicious when he offered his services as a chiropractor. After several failed attempts, he met Peter Cullen, who later founded RECLINK and established The Choir of Hard Knocks. Peter and Dein later became close friends while Peter continued to advocate on behalf of Hands On Health. As a Pastoral and Outreach worker at the Sacred Heart Mission, Peter understood the potential of Dein's vision.



He then met Sacred Heart Mission founder Father Ernie Smith who invited him to set up in a small room under the staircase at Sacred Heart Mission in St Kilda. Ernie and future colleague Michael Portelli supported Dein's work, always suggesting he start slowly and build each client's confidence. Ernie wisely suggested Dein rename himself 'The Bone Man' to ease clients into the modality of chiropractics.

Building trust and rapport was a big learning curve for Dein in his first year as a graduate. His first client at Sacred Heart was a man called John the Baptist for his prophetic street persona. He would dress in colourful robes and bless people on the street. After feigning paralysis during his first treatment, he promptly jumped up as the morning tea bell rang and left a condom in the donation box.

The clinic grew from that point to include students from The Division of Chiropractic at RMIT University, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Naturopathy. Dein and Catherine later moved to Newcastle and set up a HOH clinic at The Salvation Army Youth Crisis Centre and another in Kings Cross at The Wayside Chapel. New HOH clinics are now opening up around the world, including the Philippines. Clinics now include osteopathy, massage, nursing, podiatry, psychology and some general medicine practitioners.

Indigenous elder Paul Gordon later supported Dein to complete a PhD

on "Promoting the musculoskeletal health of Indigenous Australians living in rural communities". He also helped developed hands-on programs in several Indigenous communities including the Gumbangirr and Dunghutti communities of Kempsey and Nambucca (NSW), and the Guugu Yimithirr community of Cape York.

This model of accredited, on-site clinical training in marginalized communities is beginning to provide sustainable and culturally sensitive care to many people in Australia and overseas. In the Philippines, Project HOPE (Hands On Philippines Education) trains people living in the squatter communities in advanced massage therapy to care for people who endure painful, disabling conditions from their heavy, repetitive workloads.

Mother Theresa always said it was much easier to give food, but harder to get through the inner poverty. The Indigenous healers say no medication can fix a broken heart. Natural Therapies offer the benefits of nurturing the soul while lifting the spirit.

Dein strongly urges all students to participate in volunteer work at one of the clinics and to step outside their comfort zone. They are guaranteed an experience of a lifetime. He says most people who have worked at one of the clinics have been touched by the experience of working with

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## About HOHA

HOHA aims to assist communities to improve the delivery of health and other services to marginalized people, utilizing the resources of community volunteers. Volunteers work in communities providing various therapies and services to those who would be otherwise unable to access them. These services include: chiropractic, dentistry, dermatology, general medicine, hairdressing, massage, naturopathy, nursing, physiotherapy, podiatry, psychology and legal advice.

HOH provides administrative support to established clinics and assists clinics with funding through small seeding loan when funds permit. They also assisting students with expenses for travel to remote areas to work on HOH projects with a travelling scholarship. HOH liaises with educational institutions, particularly those teaching chiropractic, massage, psychology and naturopathy. The Division of Chiropractic at RMIT University has had a long history of chiropractic interns working in HOH Clinics and projects.

HOH currently provides certificates and diploma level courses in myotherapy for Indigenous students and delivers a massage therapy course in Manila. Their involvement in Aboriginal communities has included the provision of training for health workers in accredited massage therapy as well as the direct provision of services including chiropractic and massage therapy.



## Geelong

The Geelong HOH clinic opened in September this year. New clients and practitioners welcome.

**Phone Paul on 0402 041 574 for details.**