

Business community fights for respite services

The Living Without Limits Foundation started by Steve Maras and Phillip De Pinto hopes to give respite care services to families with sick children in South Australia

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HELEN VELISSARIS

"In a lot of cases, the parents can't cope. They separate/divorce, it puts huge strains on their finances, because all your money is put into carers and therapists, it's really hard," says property businessman Steve Maras.

He has witnessed first hand how families with sick children struggle to maintain a strong and healthy family life.

The strain is real. There is no button they can press to relieve tension or give them a break, and for many, finances are tight.

This is the reality that many families in South Australia are facing, and demand for respite care is overflowing.

It's something that the government has left underfunded, while the number of families needing this type of help continually grows.

This is why Mr Maras and friend Phillip De Pinto created Living Without Limits in 2012. With the help of accountant George Yatzis, the foundation has grown into a strong fundraising organisation that provides help for the neglected sector.

In just 18 months and three major fundraising events later, the foundation has raised over \$170,000 to help families with sick children, specifically for children suffering from autism, cerebral palsy, juvenile diabetes and epilepsy.

"We want this organisation to talk to families and their affected children about living their lives without any limits and doing the best that they can," Mr Maras tells Neos Kosmos.

Chairman and co-founder, Phillip de Pinto's main aim was to help families affected by these illnesses after he himself understood the difficulties first hand.

His son Mario -Mr Maras' godson in fact- was diagnosed with autism.

The founders now spend their spare time contributing to the organisations that help families with these issues while working on a larger goal.

Living Without Limits has already donated funds to Juvenile Diabetes, Epilepsy SA, Footworks (an organisation that helps with cerebral palsy) and even donated 10 iPads to the Women's and Children's hospital in Adelaide.

Now the focus will shift to raising \$350,000 to buy a property that will give families a chance to rest and relax free of charge, the main goal of the organisation when it started.

"We're going to buy a property somewhere by the seaside about an hour out of Adelaide and we're going to establish a house of respite," Mr Maras explains.

"Families never get away, they've got no money and can't go on holidays and they can't get a break."

"We've already entered into deals with furniture people to donate the furniture and bedding, petrol vouchers to get them there and we're talking to the supermarkets about getting a \$200 food voucher."

Mr Maras says there is a huge need for a free respite centre in Adelaide and meets more and more



(http://neoskopos.com/news/sites/default/files/2014/May/maras_ipads.jpg)

Steve Maras (L) and Phillip De Pinto (C) donating iPads to the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide.

families every day that are desperate for some help like this.

"There was one family a month ago that had not been away for thirteen years since they've had their disabled child," Mr Maras says.

The house will be fitted to be handicap accessible, while it will be rented out free of charge every week to one family, meaning the house will cater to 52 families a year.

Last week the Foundation hosted a Football Legends Lunch that raised over \$40,000 for the cause.

South Australian football legends, Neil Kerley, Barrie Robran and Russell Ebert came in support of the event and were involved in a memorable panel discussion led by MC, Brent Felice of Coopers.

From the event, more donations have been flooding in and the current total is close to \$50,000.

Already the group is working on organising their next event, and are imploring the business community of South Australia to get involved.

"These events bring the best out of human nature," Mr Maras says.

"It's immensely important for business people to give."

For more information and to donate, visit www.lwl.org.au (<http://www.lwl.org.au>)

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