

Making progress for the homeless

'We are not as good as we should be,' the federal opposition leader Bill Shorten had observed in Melbourne early one Friday morning, on 8 September, when Major Brendan Nottle set out to walk to Canberra.

'But, he added, 'there's always the one person, the one man or woman, who can help us make a difference – that's part of change. Change does not happen automatically. I'm optimistic that together we can make Brendan's walk a success.'

On Monday, 16 October, 40 days and 703 km later, Brendan reached Canberra. He had spoken to thousands of Australians, helped raise more than \$123,000, gathered more than 9,340 signatures on a homelessness petition he presented to government. The major's long walk and brisk swim across the Murray River also received more 400 media hits across Australia, estimated to be worth more than \$2 million, which reached 20 million Australians with his call for a national, bipartisan policy to eliminate homelessness.

By any measure, Brendan's walk has succeeded.

But as the major himself told *e-connect*, 'it's only the beginning. We have to maintain the heat, in both the public and the political realms. This is a key issue for so many people in Australia; for example, housing affordability and homelessness are the number one and two issues for the lord mayors of our capital cities.'

'We now have a public commitment from the Labor Party, and the prime minister would like to catch up again to further discuss the issues around homelessness,' Brendan told *e-connect*.

'We have done well to bring the conversation back to homelessness, but now we have to maintain the interest of politicians and bureaucrats, to make sure the issue does not get sidelined.

'We will push the reality of homelessness until our politicians at the federal level legislate their policies and implement them; not just talk about them. We need action.'

For the footsore Salvo, the journey has to continue. 'The future is up to all of us,' Brendan says; as it should be.

After all, as Victoria's premier Andrews acknowledged at the launch of Brendan's walk, 'a bad break or two, a bad decision or two, and any of us could be touched by homelessness'.

During and after the trek to Canberra, Major Nottle met with a raft of federal, state and local leaders and ministers to urge a united, targeted approach to eliminating homelessness. The leaders include prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, federal opposition leader Bill Shorten, premier Daniel Andrews, Adam Bandt MP, senator Doug Cameron, senator Patrick Dodson, lord mayor Robert Doyle, senator Derryn Hinch, senator Richard Di Natale, Christian Porter MP, senator Scott Ryan, Michael Sukkar MP, Alan Tudge MP, and members of the Nick Xenophon Party. He also addressed the conference of capital city lord mayors, held in Canberra.