



E FOR EMPATHY - AN ACT OF *Kindness*

Tina Nettlefold & Susan Barton

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Victorian charity lionesses **Tina Nettlefold** and **Susan Barton** want Australians to embrace the E word. That would be E for empathy.

They believe that it's not up to governments to support charities, but each one of us should do whatever we can, whether on a corporate level or by donating something as simple as a gift card.

Between them, these two women pack a powerful punch. Susan Barton AM - the founder of *The Lighthouse Foundation*, is a revolutionary Australian charity leader, caring for vulnerable infants, children and influencing the outcomes of youth homelessness.

There are currently around 19 Lighthouse homes in Australia, offering shelter at any one time.

Charismatic and dynamic, Tina Nettlefold, has a background in interior design with her own Aussie made homewares brand, *T-House*. It's one of the only companies in the world where 100% of the profits go to charity. T-House looks after three Australian charities including The Lighthouse Foundation.

Nettlefold doesn't just give financial support to *The Lighthouse Foundation*, she gives her time. She uses her decorating skills to turn each Lighthouse property into a home that will try to make many traumatised residents feel better, once they step inside.

She has brought her magic touch to four homes so far and on a practical level supplied everything from food in the pantry to televisions and so much more, right down to the toiletries beautifully arrayed on the bench tops. Her mission is to make those who have been made to feel very small in life, experience a warm and lovely space.



Susan Barton, Tina Nettlefold and Jo Stanley

Both Susan Barton and Tina Nettlefold are miracle workers, who are not content to sit on life's sidelines, well, they don't even know where the sidelines are.

Incredibly humble, Susan Barton started housing vulnerable young people in her own home through foster care more than 40 years ago. This followed a life changing stint as a volunteer in an orphanage.

The Lighthouse Foundation is a natural extension to foster care and allows the disadvantaged to feel part of a community. It is not government funded and relies on the support of corporate sponsors and the generosity of individual donors. However, in the current tough economic conditions, seeding more funds is crucial.

"Lighthouse has a unique level of care," Barton tells Australian Life. "We don't just put a roof over people's heads but we have several psychologists on call 24/7 to help these young people who have been through unimaginable trauma."

"Around 87% of these children who come into our homes, never experience homelessness again and that's an enormous percentage," she explains. "But many of them arrive with all of their belongings contained inside one plastic bag."



Susan Barton AM, Lighthouse Foundation Founder, Dr Eamonn McCarthy, Lighthouse Foundation CEO, Christine, former Lighthouse young person and Inaugural Graduate Patron.



LIGHTHOUSE
FOUNDATION *for youth*

MAKE A
DONATION

This is where Tina Nettlefold comes in, ensuring that each person has everything they need to thrive. She explains that in the past, furniture brands have kindly donated major items from their warehouses including sofas and dining tables. However, finding others willing to do this is increasingly difficult, especially in the current tough times.

Recently Nettlefold concentrated her efforts on preparing a home for young women were fleeing from forced marriages. The youngest was just 12 years old.

“I go in and supply the kitchen with pots, pans and tableware,” Nettlefold tells *Australian Life*. “I put in a television, mops, brooms, vacuum cleaners. With young women going into the home, we organised all the beauty products and basics including clothes and pyjamas.”

“We raise a lot of money through T-House but a lot of it comes out of my own pocket,” she explains.

With a sizeable following on social media, Nettlefold also called on influencers to donate any products they didn't need.

“There's plenty of companies overflowing with stock they're no longer selling and they don't donate anything. Influencers, on the other hand, get a bad rap but they ended up giving so much to Lighthouse,” she points out.

“We would love companies to donate homewares. So, if they're people out there with Aussie-made products, please donate,” she pleads.



Lighthouse particularly needs new towels and sheets for the residents. They need to find food partners who are also willing to deliver their fresh chicken, eggs, fruit and vegetables. Providing nutritious food for residents is one of the foundation's most pressing needs, along with kitchen tables and fridges.

“It's not like we're furnishing 100 homes,” Nettlefold points out. “We're just doing one home at a time, but the satisfaction that comes from putting donated stock to good use is immediate.”

“The suppliers can see their leftover stock, which was just collecting dust on display and they feel proud to have contributed. So, if there's people out here with Aussie made products and you have leftover stock, please donate.”

Nettlefold explains that it's important not to have secondhand furniture and used goods.

“These young people come into the homes from the most difficult of circumstances. They've never had anything new. But we want to show them that they do deserve the best just like everyone else,” she says.

Nettlefold also reached out to her social media followers to provide clothing for those young women feeling forced marriages. “We received many vouchers from clothing brands and we left them on the desks in the residents' rooms. So, they not only had new makeup and beauty products but beautiful vouchers, so they could go shopping. It made such a huge difference,” she says.

Both Barton and Nettlefold agree that no child should be homeless in Australia.

“It's a community responsibility and not a government responsibility. You don't see homeless people in a village in Greece or Italy because they're cared for,” says Nettlefold. “The way we treat the disadvantaged here, says a lot about who we are as a nation.”

A little empathy goes a long way.



Susan Barton & Tina Nettlefold

by Features Editor
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