

The ride that changes lives

RECENTLY 21 real estate professionals set off on a 500km bike ride to raise funds for underprivileged children in Thailand. Here, the founder of the ride, the charity they're riding for and the riders share the life-changing effect their generosity has created.



Giving disadvantaged children a choice in life, making new friends, creating healthier mindsets and building better relationships with their own children, were just a handful of the life-changing benefits from the latest Digital Live Charity Ride in Thailand.

Led by Digital Live Founder Steve Carroll, the 'Home Hug Ride' saw 21 riders, most of them real estate professionals, cycle 535km across northern Thailand in five days to raise \$163,000 for the charity Hands Across the Water.

Established in 2005 by former Australian forensic police officer, Peter Baines OAM, Hands Across the Water is dedicated to protecting and providing shelter and

education for disadvantaged children in Thailand who may have lost their parents, are unable to be cared for by their family or who have HIV and need support to live with the virus.

Since 2019, Digital Live has organised four rides, with \$1.1 million dollars raised for Hands Across the Water.

"All of that money has gone to the building of an education centre to give the kids the opportunity to learn how to use technology

and how to use computers," Steve says.

"With the ability to use technology, it increases the chance of the children getting a better job.

"If you can't use technology, the opportunity for jobs is really slim, and the girls will often fall into poor jobs, including prostitution, and the boys will fall into jobs that could involve drugs."

Hands Across the Water started out supporting 34 children in the small

"Through this centre, we're able to provide different training, different skill sets for them to be able to work and do some amazing jobs in the tech space, but not have to leave their communities." – Claire Baines



community of Khao Lak and has since expanded to care for 350 children across seven projects throughout Thailand.

Hands Across the Water Chief Executive Officer Claire Baines says being able to build the Digital Learning Centre in the Isaan Region would be "game-changing".

"A lot of the children don't want to leave their communities because that's their culture," she says.

"Through this centre, we're able to provide different training, different skill sets for them to be able to work and do some amazing jobs in the tech space, but not have to leave their communities."

Claire says real estate tech company DIAKRIT was helping with training programs that teach the children skills such as how to retouch photos and 3D imaging,

with the potential for them to join the company's Thai workforce.

"It's invaluable to be able to provide these pathways," she says.

Claire says one of many success stories from children at Hands Across the Water is that of Game.

After losing both his parents and no longer being able to stay with extended family, Game went to live at the Baan Tharn Namchai project when he was 12.

"He went to high school, he went to university, and he graduated with a law degree," Claire says.

"He has just finished his MBA and has now received a scholarship to go to Canberra to do his PhD.

"He is our hero child."

Steve says one of the most amazing parts of the ride was the participation of monk



Mai Thiew, who cycled every kilometre in her robes.

"She did it to prove to the 300-plus children in her care the importance of resilience," he says.

"She very much commands a Mother Teresa reputation in Thailand."

One Agency Sunbury Director Adrian Sacco did the previous two rides and has already signed up for a third in 2023.

The rides he completed in 2019 and 2020 he did with his son Thomas, who was 14 when he embarked on the first adventure.

Adrian says as well as being able to support Thai children, doing the ride has helped strengthen his relationship with his son.

"I went through a hell of a journey with my son on the bike ride because our relationship was struggling when I went on the ride with him and today we're inseparable, so it's had a profound effect in a lot of ways for us.

"At the start of the bike ride we were riding apart, and at the end of the bike ride, we were riding together." ■

THE IMPACT OF THE 2022 RIDE ON THE PARTICIPANTS

From helping raise funds to change the lives of the Hands Across the Water children to finding inner strength and walking away with a stronger, more at peace mindset, the benefits of completing the ride have been vast. Here, nine riders share what the ride means to them.

ETIENNE LABUSCHAGNE
Harcourts Solutions

"I have six kids, so kids are very dear to me, and I thought, 'If I can add value to the less fortunate in any way, while having fun, then why not?'"

"We all became very good friends (the riders). When you achieve something together, there's a bond that no one can break. Ever."

JULIE-ANN BALL
Timms Real Estate

"I was there to support the children, but I grew as a person too. I learnt a lot about myself and my inner strength."

AIMEE NICHOLLS
Harcourts Dapto

"In a personal growth sense, it's assisted me to take a step back and go, 'Hang on a second, that's really nothing to complain about', because I've been in an environment where these kids don't have very much and yet they're so happy and grateful. It puts things into perspective."

COLIN GOODING
First National Latrobe

"Anxious people like me need to be challenged, and I'm pretty big on mental health. I've been doing a lot of work on that over the past 10 or 15 years. So when you're challenged, and you do something so significant, this internal support grows. There's something that changes (within you), and it's just so fulfilling to look back now."

MICHAEL GARSIDE
Harcourts Dapto

"It is life-changing for many reasons. Whether it's overcoming a 500km ride, overcoming 120km a day, or riding in to see those kids, the impact you can have on the children and just how much they love to see you riding in to see them. It's just absolutely brilliant."

SIMON MYERS
DIAKRIT

"Our production team is based in Bangkok, and we hire hundreds of Thai nationals on a yearly basis. We have done for many years because it's been our head office for a number of years.

"It's about giving back to the Thai community and our way of respecting what they do for our business and our ability to grow and do what we do."

DAVID DWYER
Dwyer Properties

"I found it quite an

emotional journey, especially riding into Home Hug at the end of it all. When the children were there waiting for us with our photo around their neck, that was just a moment I'll never forget. I had the joy of doing it with my son, Harrison, and at the end I went over and gave Harrison a hug and sort of broke down a bit into tears."

KATE ASHTON
Ballarat Real Estate – Maryborough

"We knew who we were riding for the whole way. We each had an allocated child. There were only 21 riders, and there were a lot more than 21 children, but we had more than enough love to share."

LAURA SHOOTER
SJ Shooter Real Estate

"Since coming home, there's been so much that's going to have an impact on my life forever. Some of the immediate things I've noticed are that I feel more fit and energetic. I got some closure on some things that had been on my mind... and I've been remembering to have more fun in my day-to-day life.

"The impact that has on my family, my team at work and just how much enjoyment I get from my life is enormous. If you have that intuitive 'yes' feeling, don't make a list of why not, just commit."

SIGN UP FOR THE 2023 RIDES

Supported by connectnow.

DIGITAL LIVE COASTAL RIDE

April 1-9

Hua Hin to Khao Lak
500km, 5 days riding

DIGITAL LIVE HOME HUG RIDE

August 19-27

Beung Kan to Yasothorn
500km, 5 days riding

For more information and to sign up for the rides visit handsacrossthewater.org.au



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- VALERIE TIMMS -

"THE FRIENDS YOU MAKE, BRILLIANT.
EDUCATIONAL AND ENTERTAINING."



- LOUISE LUPTON -

"FOR MY MENTAL HEALTH, ONE OF THE MOST
SIGNIFICANT THINGS I HAVE EVER DONE."



- COLIN GOODING -

"SO MEMORABLE SEEING THE KIDS' FACES."



- KATIE COTTON -



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