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Thank God for the Salvos: how far \$1 can go

THIS WEEK FROM THE NEWSROOM...

ON FRIDAY, I learned how far a dollar can go.

I was invited to the western Sydney launch of The Salvation Army's Red Shield Doorknocking Appeal, which is this weekend.

When I returned from maternity leave in January and learned we were the media partner for the western Sydney branch, and if I would continue supporting their efforts, it was a no-brainer.

The launch at Castle Hill RSL was attended by former prime minister John Howard and current and former political leaders from both sides of politics who all called out for the crowd to give generously.

But the biggest highlight of the launch was a speech from guest speaker, Mathew Kratiuk.

We were warned - Matt premised his speech with a guarantee we would be in tears by the end, and he was right.

Matt spilt his heart out on the stage as he talked about his life before he met the Salvos - his 17 years as an ice and drug addict, alcoholic, biker leader, stand-over man and hardened criminal. He talked of the numerous times he tried to quit his habits, his addictions and his criminal behaviour, but just couldn't.

At his lowest point, he was in a room by himself, cut off from friends and family, with a gun that went off when he dropped it. After an excruciating three-month wait, he entered a Salvation Army rehabilitation course for ice addicts.

On Friday, he was supported by his mum, his girlfriend, and his employers from Hi Pages, a transformed man. He credits his new life as a Pastor to the Salvos, as do many others.

What is constantly reiterated by those touched by the Salvos, is their understated presence. We always see the Salvos standing quietly in a corner or in a shopping centre with their buckets, waiting, unassumingly,

for a donation.

But they will be in your face this weekend, as volunteers for the Red Shield Appeal knock on your doors asking for a donation - just a dollar.

Funds raised provides hope where it is needed most through the Salvos' social welfare and community service programs. But they need help. For those who don't carry change, they now have a tap-n-go system.

They do the work we can't - or won't. So give generously.

■ Heloise Reece is the north-west Sydney regional editor for Fairfax Media.

