



New(town) Beginnings #29

Dear Neighbour,

I first heard snippets of Marina's story a few weeks into starting my role at [Newtown Neighbourhood Centre](#) (NNC) back in 2017. My colleagues had met the pair a few months prior, after they were referred to NNC by a friend who volunteered at Lentil As Anything.

A year or two earlier, Marina's husband at the time had accrued thousands of dollars in debt against her name and acquired a debilitating drug addiction, all due to a chronic gambling addiction she had no idea about. They instantly lost their home and most of their belongings were repossessed.

Marina and her young teenage daughter were now suddenly penniless and homeless. They relied on the support of family members and couch surfed for some time; they also slept rough in parks. As soon as they visited the Centre on a Thursday afternoon, during our essential services hub, One Stop Shop, our staff were able to provide them the guidance they needed to rebuild their lives.

Eventually they were able to rent a tiny studio room in Newtown with shared facilities but no kitchen. It was tough to live under these conditions but it was important for them to stay in the area so they could take advantage of these established support systems already in place such as NNC, Newtown Mission, the Greek Church and Lentil As Anything.

In 2018, I interviewed Marina not long after she finally received an offer from Housing NSW to move into a 2-bedroom unit in South East Sydney.

"Our new home is huge and it's close to my brother, so it's great to have family nearby," said Marina. "I jumped for joy and cried lots of happy tears." Her daughter had also received an offer to study at university – testament to their enormous strength and resilience.

Today, Marina is thriving and can navigate her way around a commercial kitchen, preparing the freshest, healthiest food including salads, curries and pastas. It's with tremendous thanks to the social enterprise [Two Good Co](#), where Marina and women with similar stories can rebuild their lives and forge new careers.

The pre-packaged food prepared by Two Good staff is sold to cafes, and passed on to community organisations such as ours to distribute to those in need free of charge in a pay-it-forward model.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

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They also produce skincare products and clothing items, all using sustainable materials.

“I tasted my first Two Good meal – a chicken soup – at the Newtown Neighbourhood Centre a few years ago. We were starving and it was so good,” recalls Marina.

“At that point, I originally applied for Two Good’s employment program but I found it difficult to juggle personal things with the idea of starting a job. I wasn’t ready the first time, but I’m here now and giving it everything I’ve got”.

Two Good are champions of training and hiring women who need a little help to get back into the workforce. Since 2017 Two Good have trained 35 graduates on their ‘Work Work’ program, plus have another 10 in the program this year.

“The impact our products and employment program has on vulnerable women is paramount. Most graduates secure permanent, ongoing employment and are able to get into the private rental market or affordable housing and free themselves from dependence on welfare,” explains Alex Nagle, Head of Programs and Community Engagement.

Two Good are long-time supporters of NNC and we’re always grateful for their donations. Whether it’s for our biggest fundraiser, Newtopian Sleepout or our weekly One Stop Shop, Two Good generously supply us with meals to feed our vulnerable community members.

“NNC is our neighbour and collaborator. We ultimately share the same mission and advocate for progress on issues such as domestic and family violence or increasing financial insecurity and homelessness for women – it takes everyone working together to make a difference,” reflects Alex.

Thankfully the COVID-19 crisis hasn’t affected their business too much. Their recent fundraising appeal has brought in enough support that they’ve been able to extend their weekly meal donations to Western Sydney, adding 6 new women’s refuges to their run, delivering as far as Katoomba. They’ve committed to supporting women’s services on the bushfire affected south coast for the next year and have so far delivered 1625 meals, 96 bottles of hand sanitiser, 480 toilet rolls plus luxurious bathrobes and handbags.

They really are too good.

Mel
Community Strengthening Team

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