

# Beds for homeless pack a punch

By Mike Morris

HUSBAND and wife team Tony and Lisa Clark have invented a backpack bed that they give away to charities to pass on to homeless people.

The 'swags' take the 'rough' out of sleeping rough.

Since they started in 2007 the Clarks have given away more than 400 backpack beds, most of them to charities in the inner city through their organisation Swags for Homeless.

But recently Reverend Steve Rose of the Church of Christ, Chelsea, has been receiving the backpack beds for homeless people who come to his church in Blantyre Avenue.

He thinks they are wonderful and is organising for some to be given to Frankston City Life and the Frankston churches community breakfast, the Brekky Club – both of which give free meals to the homeless and the needy.

Made from a lightweight, breathable, extremely strong material called UltTrexLite, the backpack beds are waterproof, windproof, fire retardant and anti-mildew.

Inside the kit is a 190-centimetre long foam mattress with silver insulated backing. When put up it is like a little cave with mosquito nets at both ends.

The backpack straps are padded and all seams are double stitched. The kit also has a carry handle, peg loops at all corners, an extendable floor, a zipped internal pocket to store valuables and a Kevlar (10 times stronger than steel) loop for an external cable lock to stash the backpack bed safely during the day.

Unlike canvas, the backpack bed is quick drying. It weighs only four kilograms, half the weight of a canvas tent.

The 2006 census showed there were 104,600 people classified as 'homeless' in Australia – 16,375 were sleeping



**Jolly swagman:** Steve Rose tries out the backpack bed with Tony Clark.  
Picture: Gary Sissons

rough and 46,856 were sleeping on couches in the homes of friends or family.

Shortly after he was elected prime minister, Kevin Rudd had a lot to say about the homeless, claiming 85 per cent of homeless people were turned away from rooming houses and emergency shelter because of lack of room. Yet he has not come up with a plan to do anything about it.

Melbourne Mayor Robert Doyle said

there would be no homeless in his municipality by the end of his term, but it seems he is yet to offer a solution.

Mr Clark, 37, a managing director of a video production company at Knoxfield, said Swags for Homeless was not-for-profit and received no government assistance. He said Mayor Doyle was not interested in buying the backpack beds for distribution to the homeless.

"At the cost of about 5 per cent of what the council spends on Christmas

entertainment [they] could give backpack beds to every person sleeping rough around the city.

"I've also been trying to get governments involved but to no avail."

The backpack beds are made in China to the Clarks' specifications.

"They are not [made in] sweat shops. I have been over there to check," Mr Clark said.

"We wanted to come up with a bed that gives people dignity.

"Some of the makeshift shelters most of the homeless are using are terrible – some put together with pizza cartons; potential firebombs.

"Homeless people who have the backpack beds treat them like gold."

The company sells the backpack beds to the public for \$199, but if the unit is being given to a bona fide charity the cost is only \$60 and is tax deductible.

To contact Swags for Homeless call 97649422 or [www.swags.org.au](http://www.swags.org.au)