Our People

'Show these children they're not alone': how monster ride is supporting country kids

By Dane Wilson
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When Yvonne Baker discovered her son had a number of medical issues in 1964, Royal Far West was one of the few organisations providing streamlined medical solutions for country kids.

Now, on the organisation's one-hundredth anniversary, 100 men and women from across New South Wales will embark on a three day, 380km bike ride to ensure another century of support for children.

The 11th annual RFW Ride for Country Kids will depart from Bourke on May 14 and will run through Cobar, Nyngan, and Narromine on its way to Dubbo. We spoke to one of those people putting themselves to the test for Aussie kids.

Bill Wearn (right) at the 2019 RFW Ride for Country Kids. Picture by Mark Jesser

Riding with a family legacy

The scale of Royal Far West has changed considerably since the days when Dr Walter Wearn and his wife Polly opened the first comprehensive travelling dental service in country NSW in 1935.

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Their grandson, Bill Wearn, will now embark on his tenth Royal Far West ride, which has landed him all across the state.

For Bill, the chance to help Royal Far West's mission is not just part of a family story, but deeply personal.

Bill's son Fraser passed away in 2012 at only 12 years old. Seeking solace in fitness and wellbeing, Bill contributes to the campaign as a way to help other families avoid that pain.

"The Royal Far West is a truly familial environment. It is a place for friendship, for community, for wellbeing, and to do something meaningful with family and friends," Mr Wearn said.

Dr Wearn and Mrs Wearn. Royal Far West travelling dental service, 1935. Picture supplied by Royal Far West

"My grandparent's train carriage is memorialised at the Cobar Museum as a symbol of their having travelled the state and supported kids. The ride gives me a fraction of that.

"There is a lot of pain in the world, so it is more than rewarding to find myself taking part in visits to schools and to really see parents and kids who we have made a real difference in the lives of. To show them they are not alone.

"It makes us all a lot more community minded and you can see it, people who have joined in recent years have a completely more positive mindset and benefit from familiar faces and bringing change.

"The rides can be challenging but they are getting a little bit easier every year with more wisdom and experience. I ride about 140km a week for the six months before these events just to stay in shape.

'Only possible due to the Royal Far West'

Mrs Baker's family has a long history of helping, and benefiting from, the Royal Far West Children's Health Scheme.

Her Mother and Aunt went to one of the first Royal Far West Christmas Camps in Manly in 1933. From Bourke, the pair were treated for a number of health issues by Rev. Stanley Drummond's team.

Mrs Yvonne Baker. Picture supplied by Royal Far West

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In 1964, Mrs Baker gave birth to her son Paul, who was born with a cleft palate and speech impediment as well as considerable hearing issues and a heart murmur.

Paul was identified by Royal Far West as a child patient in need and he was afforded operations and speech therapy at the Manly clinic and at home in the North West in 1970.

Mrs Baker said that if there is one thing her mother instilled into her, it is to 'always be grateful for, and support, the Royal Far West'.

"My boy Paul was one of the many country kids who needed the program, all the way until he was 14, and it has really made him who he is today," Mrs Baker said.

"Paul has gone on to serve in Brisbane Hospitals for decades and he has become a really good success story. I have no doubt that a lot of his opportunities were only possible due to the Royal Far West.

"That legacy goes back to my Mother and Aunt. When my Great-Grandson needed help in 2017, who else was there but the Royal Far West?

"I am just so proud of the people attached to it, and I am absolutely thrilled to see one-hundred people take part in the ride this year. It really means a lot to see so many people emboldened by the spirit of Reverend Drummond." Mrs Baker said.

Fundraising platform GoFundMe has ranked Australia's most generous cities after a record 1.4 million donations were made in 2023.

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Mrs Baker has also contributed to RFW, serving as the Dubbo Branch's Vice President. Her sister will be in attendance when the riders set off from Bourke on the 14th of May.

Readers are invited to keep an eye out for the cyclists, especially when they attend the 100 year Royal Far West Gala Dinner in Dubbo on May 17, and to consider a donation to the campaign.

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A Journalist based in Dubbo, Dane is particularly interested in issues relating to local business and council, sport, politics, personal stories, history, and more. Got a story? Contact me @ dane.wilson@austcommunitymedia.com.au

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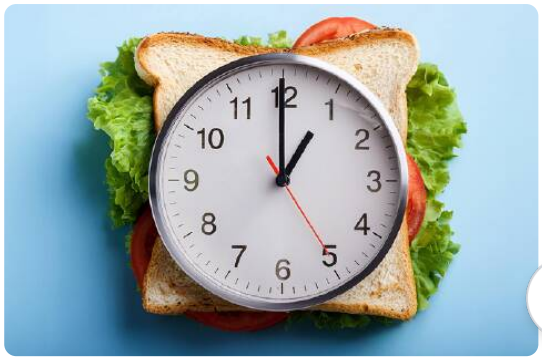

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