



Mission Australia gives new life to old mattresses destined for landfill

Thousands of old mattresses headed for the dump have been saved and recycled under a Mission Australia social enterprise aimed at protecting the environment and creating green jobs for disadvantaged and long-term unemployed people.

Mission Australia's Andrew Douglas said over the past 10 months, the organisation's *Soft Landing* program has recycled around 100,000 mattresses and bases from throughout Sydney and the Illawarra.

What's more, the program has created sustainable jobs and training opportunities for long-term unemployed jobseekers, with 65 people currently employed by the program.

"This is a great result – both for the environment and for the workers we have been able to employ to deliver this ground-breaking recycling program," Mr Douglas said.

"Many mattresses have been picked up from tips across Sydney by our resource recovery program partner at SITA Australia, and brought to our warehouses at Smithfield in the city's west and Wollongong.

"Since July last year, through the SITA recycling centres alone, 8,600 mattresses and bases have been collected, with 273 tonnes of mattress and bedding materials – 90% of the materials collected – able to be recycled or refurbished and sold.

"Without this recycling program, these unwanted beds would have ended up rotting away in landfill.

"Instead, mattresses beyond repair have been broken down, with steel springs sold as scrap metal, foam used for carpet underlay, and timber made into kindling and mulch.

"Those able to be refurbished have been sold at our Big Heart shops or donated to crisis centres."

Mr Douglas said Mission Australia has even started a sideline social enterprise – *Feather Weight* – using recycled mattress materials to fill punching bags.

"We use the mattress textiles as well as waste-clothing from op-shops to create the filling for the bags and are now supplying Spartan Sporting goods who on-sell to major retailers," Mr Douglas said.

"We've developed a world-first automated machine for making punching bags, which enables us to make around 40,000 bags a year.

"Through *Feather Weight* alone we employ 12 young people with disabilities, so it really is a great result."

Material collected by SITA and recycled at *Soft Landing* since July 2011 included:

- **141 tonnes of steel**
- **39 tonnes timber**
- **21 tonnes of foam**
- **36 tonnes of textile wadding**

SITA's General Manager, Strategy & Sustainable Development, Simon Lee, said: "Partnering with enterprise organisations, like Mission Australia, to develop resource recovery solutions to every day recyclable items is key to SITA's sustainability values.

"And, although key to SITA's business, our partnership is not just about keeping mattresses' out of landfill, but providing a holistic solution to environmental and social challenges."

Mission Australia NSW Operations Manager of Social Enterprise, Bill Dibley said the program is turning a major problem into a community solution.

“Each year in Australia around 1.25 million mattresses end up in landfill,” he said.

“They are the most common item put out for council collection, with Australians on average replacing their bedding every 10 years.

“Not only is this an incredible burden on the environment, it’s a huge waste of valuable, usable resources.

“By putting these old mattresses to good use we are helping to create a greener future while providing employment opportunities.

“Most of the workers we employ in the business are now undertaking traineeships in Waste Management. These are people who were doing it tough and would otherwise have found it extremely difficult to get into the labour market.

“It’s great to see this program providing opportunities for disadvantaged Australians to land a job. What’s more, it’s an opportunity for them to be a part of something really special.

“It’s a great example of how recycling is good for the environment, good for the economy, and good for the wellbeing of our community.”

The *Soft Landing* program was established by Mission Australia in 2009, as a social enterprise to provide jobs and traineeships to disadvantaged job seekers in the Illawarra – a region that has suffered high unemployment levels in recent years, particularly among local youth.

The business has expanded at such a rapid rate a second site was established in Western Sydney to keep up with demand.

Any profits from the sale of mattresses or recycled materials go back into the business, to provide further job opportunities and improve the environmental outcomes of the program.

Mission Australia Media Contact: Nicola Hazell 0467 783 421

SITA Media Contact: Simon Lee 0419 561 197