



ZONTA
CLUB OF
BENDIGO INC
MEMBER OF ZONTA INTERNATIONAL
EMPOWERING WOMEN
THROUGH SERVICE & ADVOCACY

Zonta Bendigo Tote Bags – Providing Dignity in a Time of Difficulty

The Zonta Club of Bendigo's Tote Bag project regularly provides bags of mini- or travel-sized toiletries to our local public hospital, and agencies which support the homeless and those in crisis in our community primarily women and children. The bags are then passed on to people who, for whatever reason, find themselves in immediate need, and without access to family or other social supports.

Each tote bag is hand-made by a club member, and contains several small soaps or body washes, mini-shampoos and conditioners, travel-sized tubes of body lotion and tooth paste, a tooth brush, deodorant, sanitary products, comb or brush, and a purse pack of tissues. A bag contains sufficient toiletries to get someone through a short period until they are able to either return home or gain more medium-term or ongoing support.

While the primary focus is on supporting women and children in need, Zonta Bendigo also recognises that crisis and homelessness doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender or age. Bags are also provided for males in need.

The purpose of the bags is to provide people who are in immediate or short-term difficulty, and struggling with access to the basic personal hygiene we are lucky enough to take for granted each day, with a small measure of dignity and care. In addition to supporting those in housing crisis, the bags are also distributed to hospital patients who suddenly find themselves, or a loved one, admitted to hospital unexpectedly. Bendigo's public hospital services a significant area of central and north-western Victoria, and often people travel long distances to clinics. If they find themselves or a family member being unexpectedly admitted for treatment, they may not have toiletries with them, or an immediate family member or friend who can purchase something for them.

Positive feedback from crisis housing organisations and our hospital has reinforced that both staff and recipients are very appreciative of our bags. Staff appreciate them because the bags enable them to provide a concrete measure of practical assistance to someone in need, and without placing financial pressure on either the recipient or the organisation. Recipients appreciate them because not only do the bags provide needed toiletries and a measure of personal dignity, but are also a symbol that someone cares about them in a time when they are struggling.

We rely on the generosity of a lot of people for our Tote Bag project. Fortunately, the members of our club are very generous, not only donating travel toiletries they may have acquired in trips for work or pleasure, but also in purchasing items for the bags. A number of local motels and a dental practice have also donated large quantities of shampoos, conditioners, lotions and tubes of tooth paste.

Our Tote Bag project is proof positive that even the simplest things can make a real difference, and help others in need.

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