

ROCHELLE COURTENAY

The former personal trainer was so moved by the plight of disadvantaged women, she banded together a group of people to help. Now her charity Share the Dignity is changing lives

A couple of years ago, I read an article about how homeless women and women fleeing domestic violence did not have basic female hygiene products – right here in Australia. I couldn’t believe it. It engendered such a visceral response in me. I had suffered from endometriosis, and I just couldn’t imagine what it would be like to not have the means to buy the most basic of products. Some problems seem so hard to fix, like cancer. But when I read that article about those poor women I thought, “I can fix this.” That’s how Share the Dignity came about.

Share the Dignity is a charity that started in 2015 and, at its core, aims to provide disadvantaged women with sanitary items. It has grown beyond that – we are looking into a pilot program for kids affected by family violence for instance. In the beginning, all I did was go out to my local community to ask for their help, and it just goes to show how we are capable of doing such amazing things because everyone started sharing the news about the cause. I didn’t do it on my own; it was a community of people who said “that’s not acceptable” and did something about it.

I find it embarrassing to be given a humanitarian award [Courtenay received the 2016 *Cosmopolitan* Humanitarian of the Year award] because I’m only the face of this campaign. We now have 1500 volunteers who work tirelessly, day in and day out. Nothing gets done



without these hardworking women. And yes, it’s mainly women – out of our 1500 volunteers, only two are men.

Surrounding myself with good people has led me down this path and made it all possible. I have a very smart partner, Shayne, who is a great sounding board. He has four children and I have two, so we’re a pretty big blended family. Thank goodness all the kids are 17 and over because I never would have been able to start this charity if I’d had small kids.

I didn’t have any prior knowledge on how to run a charity before Share the Dignity. That proved to be a good thing because I looked outside the box and went, “How do we do things that are different?” And now we’ve raised money from all sorts of initiatives – maybe one day we could even set up a women’s refuge for those fleeing domestic violence. Imagine that. ★ To help Share the Dignity, visit sharethedignity.com.au.

Rochelle’s tips for how to be more charitable

- 1 Kindness is magic and absolutely free to give. Sprinkle it around with abundance.
- 2 Volunteering is food for the soul – your soul – and the person you end up helping. You don’t have to spend hours volunteering either; give what time you can.
- 3 Smile! A lot. Just one smile could change someone’s day or maybe their life.

STELLAR PICKS

★ things to try this week



TASTE For the fourth year, **Newtown Good Food Fair** in Sydney’s inner west will be celebrating the suburb’s eclectic spirit. Watch live entertainment from communal tables, where you can enjoy food and drink from local purveyors. Today, from 11 am.

READ Allison Pearson’s *How Hard Can It Be?* is a coming-of-age story... for adults. Protagonist Kate Reddy is nearing 50, juggling teens with ageing parents and feeling invisible at work. Prepare to laugh, cry, repeat. Out now, \$29.99; harpercollins.com.au.

HELP **McHappy Day** aims to raise a record-breaking \$4.1 million for Ronald McDonald House Charities this year. Two dollars from every Big Mac sold on McHappy Day will go directly to the charity. Go on, eat that burger – guilt-free. Saturday, October 14, nationwide.

STELLAR PICKS: ADRIENNE TAM