

Hart of the matter

How do you change the youth of today? It's simple, says Cairns Citizen of the Year Todd Hartley: give them a choice. He speaks to THOMAS CHAMBERLIN

TODD Hartley woke up one day and had a dream that he could make a change. But he probably didn't dream that 12 years after becoming a founding director of a Far Northern company to help disadvantaged youth, he would be crowned Cairns' Citizen of the Year in 2009.

Taking a step back in time to South Africa in the mid-1990s, Mr Hartley says he wanted to give youth a choice to right their wrongs.

He had already learnt the ropes himself and had been around the traps. By his mid-20s he had done heavyweight boxing in the United Kingdom and played American football in the United States for the Australian team.

"I saw the result of communities that were run with no money, no infrastructure and no leadership," he says.

After receiving his wake-up call, Mr Hartley knew what he had to do.

Unhappy with crime prevention programs, he called one of Cape Town's top cops and created a hugely successful program that was later endorsed by the country's crime squad.

"I saw if we don't look after the disadvantaged and we don't look after people's hardship then crime, unruly behaviour and criminal activity is an accepted way of life."

Now step forward in time.

In 2009, Choice Australia



Management has received more than \$17.5 million in government funding to deliver 200 programs and activities, directly employed 850 people, helped employ nearly 4000 people and addressed around 30,000 school students about opportunities in life.

Offices operate in Cairns, Innisfail and Townsville and also trade in the Cape and the Gulf.

Staff help disadvantaged youth, while also supplying programs for early school-leavers, mature-aged people needing employment guidance and people with disabilities.

Wanting to help the community even further, Mr Hartley's not-for-profit organisation launched the Choice Water line in March 2007 as well as opening Ballerz Cafe.

"There is only so much money – for every 1000 people we work with, there are probably 10,000 people out there that need help," Mr Hartley says.

But even after changing the lives of thousands of people, Mr Hartley still believes the streets of Cairns are worse than they were 10 years ago.

Crime, drugs and violence are not

going away.

Mr Hartley says the gap with youth problems is widening but says the most effective form of crime prevention is through positive engagement and participation, rather than scare tactics.

Daily interaction with youth to help them overcome their problems is a must, he says.

Youth need help with training, employment, arts, sport and recreation and need to know their potential before making the right life choices.

His organisation works with training partners Tropical North Queensland TAFE and etrainu and has also created partnerships with the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Department



Passion for change: Citizen of the Year Todd Hartley believes the under-skilled will be the most disadvantaged as the economic crisis begins to deepen. One of his projects (above) was Breaking the Unemployment Cycle in 2005.

of Communities, Department of Housing, Department of Child Safety, Department of Public Works, Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Mission Australia and Northern Skills Alliance.

"I think the youth of today have a lot of problems," Mr Hartley says.

"We're dealing with a different generation and we have to think

differently. They're in a generation where they are probably confused and there are so many options.

"We need to work smarter and as a tourist-based centre, people do need to be safe.

"Collectively the youth of today are going to be the leaders of tomorrow and by ignoring (them), we are ignoring our own future."

Facing further tough economic times, Mr Hartley believes the next crisis affecting youth will be created by the downturn in the jobs sector.

Unemployment in the Far North was 10,300 in December 2008, up from 7000 in December 2007.

"Families are going to be put under all sorts of pressure," Mr Hartley says.

"The fallout will be that the skilled person will take the jobs from under-skilled people.

"Under-skilled people will be pushed further down the queue."

His goals for the next decade to help disadvantaged youth are wide-ranging but Mr Hartley believes most problems can be overcome if the Far North community is aware and focused on making a change.

"We need to provide outreach services for crime prevention, employment, homelessness, child safety, increase numeracy and literacy and (address) childhood obesity," he says.

Helping the youth of today might not seem easy, but Mr Hartley believes providing a stable environment with positive support will be the first step in overcoming a never-ending list of youth issues.

As Citizen of the Year, he says the biggest issue needing to be addressed in the community is acceptance and awareness that youth need to be given an option to make positive changes to their lives.

"Ultimately people are born with good in their hearts," he says.

"Not a lot of people understand how simple it is.

"But the question is – does the man on the street understand how really simple how it can be?"

It's hot ... damn hot!

'Southerners' will have to get used to the record temperatures as Victoria and South Australia buckle under the heat. Weather models predict heatwaves will be common in the future, writes XAVIER LA CANNA

AS far as heatwaves go, the sweltering conditions in southeastern Australia this week are remarkable.

Tens of thousands of people were left without power, train tracks buckled and the Australian Open tennis tournament came under attack for putting players at risk.

"Heat wave hell" and "Melbourne melts" were among newspaper headlines. Get used to it, was the message from weather experts.

Global warming models predict hot dry spells in the region will be increasingly common.

"Things are warming up and changing. We expect records to fall," said the weather bureau's Bill Scherek.

And since the hot spell began on Tuesday, records have tumbled.

Adelaide residents sweated through temperatures that reached 45.7C on Wednesday, their hottest day for 70 years.

Adelaide's minimum of 33.9C on Thursday was the highest-ever night temperature recorded in the city and

if forecasts run true, it will experience its longest run of 40C-plus daily temperatures since 1908.

Tasmania experienced its hottest recorded temperature, after Flinders Island airport reached 41.5C on Thursday.

Melbourne has also been breaking records. On Wednesday, Thursday and Friday the temperature was in excess of 43C, an unprecedented stretch of super-hot conditions.

The "relief" – if that is what it is – won't come until next week, when the top temperature will fall to a forecast 29C in Melbourne.

For Adelaide, the mercury will top 38C for at least the next seven days, forecasters predict.

Global warming may conjure up images of melting ice-caps, but as the temperature climbs, it also puts stress on vital infrastructure like the electricity grid, transport services



Heatstroke: This wild koala is exhausted by 40C heat outside a suburban Adelaide house.

and hospitals.

This week's heat has shown essential services are more fragile than many thought.

On both Wednesday and Thursday, more than 100,000 houses and businesses experienced power failures in Melbourne.

A national electricity grid supposed to smooth out summer drains on power failed briefly when the main electrical connection

between Victoria and Tasmania went down.

"This week is unusual but it (the heat) will become much more like the normal experience, in the range of normal heatwaves, in 10-20 years," explained Prof David Karoly from the University of Melbourne.

Within 30 years, the number of daily temperatures above 35C is expected to double in Melbourne.

Prof Karoly is an expert in meteorology, chairs the Victorian Government's climate change reference group and in 2007, shared the Nobel Peace Prize.

"It is clear the current (Victorian) public transport system is not able to cope and it is also clear that the water supply system is stretched," he said.

"The health services and the road system are also obviously stretched to their limits.

"The system can't cope now, and it is just going to get much worse," he said, stressing that he was speaking as an academic, not a government spokesman.

On Thursday, 474 trains were cancelled, about 24 per cent of that day's total services, because of heat issues.

In Adelaide, buses replaced trams for some periods as the transport system in that city also struggled.

While authorities felt the heat, so too did players at the Australian Open tennis tournament.

Late January is Melbourne's hottest period and for some players, it proved too much. Defending men's champion Novak Djokovic pulled out when the temperature reached 35C on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, in a 14-hour period in Melbourne on Wednesday, ambulance staff treated 30 people for heat exposure and another 56 for collapse.

Over the border, ambulance officers in South Australia experienced a 12 per cent jump in the total number of patients they treated.