

Hiking 690km for the homeless

By *Erin Handley*

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WALK THE LINE: Community members join in an epic hike to raise awareness about homelessness. From left, Ian Stewart from Tenterfield SES, Housing NSW's Debbie Smith, Tamworth Family Support Service's Lorrelle Munro, Patricia Waters from Moree, singer-songwriter Victoria Edwards and Hike for Homeless coordinator Leigh Smith.

Photo: Barry Smith

WHILE Tamworth residents were still sleeping soundly at 4am yesterday, a band of dedicated hikers reached Tamworth after walking all night from Gunnedah in a bid to raise awareness about homelessness.

The first Hike for Homeless has participants walking around the clock in a 690km trek to inform community members about New England's hidden homeless.

Hike for Homeless coordinator Leigh Smith said locals had been a great support, with many cars waving, cheering the hikers on and pulling over to make donations.

Toowoomba-based singer-songwriter and Hike for Homeless ambassador Victoria Edwards said the stereotypical face of homelessness is not the reality.

She said of the 28,000 homeless in NSW, many were from working families and had lost their job, missed a payment on their house and ended up living on a friend's couch or out of their car.

"They're not helpless, they're just down on their luck," Ms Edwards said.

She has seen homelessness up close and once felt compelled to take in a woman and her baby after they were left destitute due to domestic violence.

Deputy mayor Russell Webb said a major part of the problem was the difficulty of securing affordable accommodation.

“Our homelessness problems are a lot greater than people realise. People aren’t proud of it so they don’t speak about it and it is hidden away,” he said.

Hike for Homeless held a barbecue in Bicentennial Park with local support services to provide information to those at risk of homelessness and Ms Edwards performed a free concert at Wests’ Diggers last night.

Hike for Homeless will trek to Armidale today, progressing to Glen Innes and Inverell before returning to Moree on August 10.