



Hands up if you had fun at
The Portsea Camp!

Camp with heart

After more than 60 years, The Portsea Camp is still
— frankly — giving a damn Words Ariana Fabris | Photography Stephen Eastop

During these troubled times, it's always nice to know that some things don't change. At 3704 Point Nepean Road, Portsea, The Portsea Camp — formerly the Lord Mayor's Camp for Country Children — a true Victorian icon, still has a heart of gold.

Established back in the 1940s, when Melbourne's then mayor Sir Thomas Nettlefold decided that children from the bush were in need of a break, the camp's fundamental aim remains the same: give needy and disadvantaged children the "holiday of a lifetime".

Circumstances have changed, of course,

and along with that the idea of what actually constitutes a child's "special needs". In the 1940s, there were children whose fathers had died at war, those whose families were victims of devastating droughts in the Mallee and there was also no such thing as a universal health care system. Today, the camp's Chief Executive Officer, Stephen Eastop, says: "The concept of having 'special needs' is one we do not try to define too clearly as there are myriad circumstances [involved]... Children come from foster homes, from group homes and from families where a significant health or family crisis is affecting the entire family. Some children have disabilities, perhaps cerebral palsy, diabetes or epilepsy. Others have siblings who have these

problems, [and] have had to take a back seat to the needs of other children in the family. Some children are sent to camp as family breakdown is occurring or because a parent is in hospital undergoing cancer treatment."

Whatever a child's needs are, The Portsea Camp has managed to provide five heavily subsidised school holiday camps for around 1200 nine- to 12-year-olds each year for more than 60 years. It does this through a system involving sponsorship by local businesses and shires, community fundraising efforts, as well as revenue raised by the camp itself from general camp occupancy (facilities are available for hire by interested groups during non-holiday periods).



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Clockwise from top The camp is situated in one of Victoria's most scenic locations; canoeing is just one of the many activities offered; (photo needs to be replaced); it's all about fun and forging new friendships at The Portsea Camp.

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And, of course, there are the volunteers. As a non-profit organisation, The Portsea Camp has always relied heavily on these generous Victorians, with more than 500 people offering their help to the tune of \$500,000 worth of labour each year. They get to live at the camp — situated in one of Victoria's most picturesque locations — and are given a small allowance to cover travel and other costs.

"All children are cared for by our team of

volunteers," says Stephen. "Many of these people have been involved with the camp for years, in some instances more than 50 years."

No, some things just never seem to change. Thank goodness for that.

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