



Story LISA MAYO

MAGICAL ESCAPE

A one-of-a kind charity, the Magical Getaway Foundation is giving struggling Australian families life-changing, first-ever holidays as a way to rest and reconnect

Kat Stewart spent her childhood summers at a Phillip Island beach house – 20 people, three bedrooms and memories to last a lifetime. That fond nostalgia is one of the reasons she's so passionate about the Magical Getaway Foundation, which sends vulnerable families away on their first ever holiday – and this week, during Anti-Poverty Week, that's never been more important.

"When families are in crisis, they can lose more than money or housing; they often lose each other," says the Offspring star and Magical Getaway Foundation ambassador.

"A simple holiday can give children back their childhood and remind parents and carers they are not alone.

"Every child deserves more than survival. "They deserve joy, connection, rest and the chance to hope again.

"I spent most childhood Summer holidays with many cousins in a shared beach house in Phillip Island. It was chaotic, carefree and glorious."

Then when she was eight years old, her family packed up for 12 months and travelled

around Europe – until that point, she says like many fathers, her dad was a workaholic.

"My memories of him only really start that year," she says. "We became connected as a family in ways that stay with us today.

"Holidays – time away from the grinding stresses, environment and restrictions of everyday life can do that – it is a kind of magic.

"The Magical Getaway Foundation provides families operating under substantial strain who have never been able to have a holiday, the chance to stop for a few days, be together as a family, reconnect and make good memories."

Across Australia today, one in four women experience family violence and one in six children live in poverty. These issues are deeply interconnected and often lead to homelessness, social isolation and chronic stress. Often facing family violence, social isolation and the debilitating impacts of trauma, the families will be given more than just a break, they get the chance to reconnect and heal.

For families in crisis, the concept of a holiday is unimaginable – that's where the Magical Getaway Foundation steps in, says fellow ambassador and four-time Olympic speed skater, Steven Bradbury.

Magical Getaway Foundation ambassadors, actor Kat Stewart and Olympian Steven Bradbury; and, below, four young children on their first ever holiday to Phillip Island, thanks to the foundation.



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"Whether it's through financial hardship, illness, trauma, or simply being overwhelmed by life, there are thousands of families who have never had the chance to take a break," he says.

"No road trips. No beach weekends. No hotel buffet breakfasts. Just the daily struggle to get through another day.

"Then, the Magical Getaway Foundation steps in and says, you matter. That small act of generosity changes lives. I've seen it.

"Kids who've never seen the ocean, squealing with joy in the surf. Parents are smiling for the first time in a long time.

"There are many worthy charitable organisations out there but the Magical Getaway Foundation is the only one of its type in Australia. They are changing lives."

Founder and director Rosemary Teed says it's not just about the getaway – it's the hope that the getaway brings.

"As the only national charity of its kind, we gift life-changing, first-ever getaways that give vulnerable Australian children and their families time to pause, reflect and begin to see their stories anew, not as victims, but as people with the courage to hope again," she says.

"For many families, these getaways mark the first time they've been able to breathe, connect and simply be together away from the pressures of everyday life.

"It's a moment that opens the door to new memories, restored relationships and renewed faith in what life can hold."

This week, seven families across three states were gifted their first ever holiday – three families from Melbourne at Anchor Belle Holiday Park, two families from Sydney at Big4 Sydney Lakeside Holiday Park and two families from Brisbane at the Turtle Beach Resort. All included up to six nights in self-contained accommodation, a Coles gift voucher for food, petrol reimbursement and visits to three local tourist attractions.

Sarah Beck was a first ever holiday recipient in April when they went to Phillip Island and is now a member of the Foundation's Mentor/Mentee Program.

"The holiday gave us more than just rest," she says. "It gave us a vision of what life could be like, calmer, connected and full of joy." ■

To help, visit magicalgetawayfoundation.org