



# Habitat for Humanity

By Belinda Baker

*Belinda Baker interviews Justice Lucy McCallum about her volunteer work with Habitat for Humanity.*



**Belinda Baker (BB):** *I understand that you spent a day of your Christmas break volunteering for Habitat for Humanity. Can you please explain what Habitat for Humanity does?*

**Justice Lucy McCallum (LM):** Habitat for Humanity Australia is part of an international not-for-profit organisation that supports affordable housing for low-income families through financial

assistance, volunteered labour and advocacy. In Australia, they partner with families in the construction of homes. The homes are built by Habitat volunteers. The families also contribute a portion of the labour, which is then recognised as equity in the home they acquire. They are assisted financially through interest-free loans to cover the cost of construction. Habitat for Humanity also provides assistance with specific projects such as maintenance and gardening for disadvantaged or vulnerable people.

**BB:** *What work did you do with Habitat for Humanity over the Christmas break?*

**LM:** I volunteered for part of the bushfire recovery program. Habitat for Humanity managed to acquire a number of demountable homes from a caravan park in Victoria that was closing down. One of the homes was granted to a woman in the Southern Highlands whose entire home and established gardens were completely destroyed in the bushfires. She had a shocking story. She described to

me how she had watched as the fire roared over a number of houses in the street without touching them before seemingly targeting hers. She was well insured so she thought at least she would be able to rebuild. She received a substantial pay-out. Then, at a time when she was extremely vulnerable and having poor financial literacy, she was defrauded of the entire amount by a man who came to the area posing as a builder. He hit a number of families for small deposits but she trusted him with everything and lost the lot.

I was part of a crew of about eight people with a very diverse skill set. Our task was to fix up the demountable, which was a bit dilapidated, to put it in good enough condition for her to live in for a few years while she gets back on her feet. We painted the interior, dug a drainage trench around the perimeter and filled it with gravel, secured the home with long underground cables in case of high wind and patched up the exterior woodwork. I finished the day cleaning the windows.

At the end of the day, the woman took me around her block of land, which is now





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a barren wasteland, and described what her garden used to look like. It was very sad.

**BB:** *How did you first become involved in Habitat for Humanity?*

**LM:** I first encountered one of the international branches of the organisation when my youngest daughter went to Cambodia on a trip organised through her school. They worked in teams of ten and built six houses in a week. She came back with a broad smile, an appreciation of the value of fresh water and a fervent wish to own her own hammer. She still regards it as one of the most satisfying things she has done.

**BB:** *Would you recommend Habitat for Humanity for barristers who might be wanting to be involved in a volunteer activity over their next holidays? Why?*

**LM:** I would absolutely recommend volunteering for a build or one of the relief programs. It was very rewarding to be able to give so much help in one day with a well organised blitz of labour. The people in

the crew I worked with were all lovely and although the work was hot and dirty, it was companionable and very satisfying.

**BB:** *In what ways can barristers become involved with Habitat for Humanity? (including contact details)*

**LM:** Volunteering is an excellent way to get involved, if you are up for a bit of hard labour. You have to complete an occupational work, health and safety assessment on their website before you can register for any volunteering. You can also volunteer for administrative tasks. Otherwise, donations are always welcome! The best way to look into it is through the website, [www.habitat.org.au](http://www.habitat.org.au). **BN**

'With my Own Two Hands' is a regular column in *Bar News*, which looks at ways in which barristers and the judiciary are improving local, regional and international communities 'with their own two hands'.

