



{ SUSTAINABLE GIVING }
IN GOOD COMPANY

WITH SOREN MOLINEUX

We've got a company called Smile. Basically, for every item we sell we give a school uniform or T-shirt to a child in need. We call it one-for-one giving. Our motto is "Give first, wear second".

I grew up on the Sunny Coast, rode a bodyboard with a bunch of mates around Maroochydore. I moved to Peregian in 2010, and with all the Noosa points close, I now mostly ride a longboard, but I'll surf whatever the waves suit on whatever I can.

The idea for Smile came through travel. I started travelling after high school, funded my travel through uni by working in cafés, restaurants and painting houses. Naturally I went to Indo, it was close and it was cheap. We did the standard boat trips from Bali across to Lombok and Sumbawa, etc. Somewhere along the line, I just fell in love with Indonesia.

The more I went to Indo, the more inquisitive I got. I'd go and visit villages and what have you, and the overwhelming vibe I picked up was that the people are just so helpful. It was the first time I'd seen first-hand the collectivist, low socio-economic, high-population culture. The family unit is the cornerstone, simple living is the everyday thing.

No matter where friends and I were, Bali, Java, Lombok, we would find that common theme. Everyone was always very forthcoming with help or food or shelter. And it wasn't about the tourist dollar.

I loved T-shirts as a kid. Back in high school I used to print 'em up, cut out my own stencils. They were probably rubbish, truth be told. But I loved

'em. And because I used to do a lot of them for myself and buddies, I had a spare bunch that I took with me on an early trip to Indo.

I remember I was in Nusa Lembongan. As usual there were a bunch of kids running around the bungalows we were staying at. They came into our room and were looking at our shirts, loving 'em. I asked if they wanted some, and they said, "That would be amazing!"

I told them we were going for a surf and that when we returned we'd give out the tees... When we came back there were a few more kids waiting. We gave the tees out and couldn't believe the joy and excitement. It was a big thing for me at the time. It was a formative thing that stuck in my mind. Their clothes weren't terrible, but they were quite worn and clearly they didn't have access to much kit.

There was a boat driver there called Sanur, who'd drive us out to the reef. He was standing in the corner, very shy. I asked him if he'd like some tees, as I knew he had some sons. He said he couldn't accept them, but I told him it wasn't a problem, I'd brought them over for that purpose. I gave him a couple of shirts. He was overwhelmed, but for me it was a simple thing to do.

So the next day I was eating porridge and Sanur came to the bungalow with a gift for me. It was one of his own T-shirts. It was an Indo political party tee, which I've kept to this day. I'll never forget that gesture: Sanur had very little in the way of possessions - he's a boat-driver/seaweed farmer,

and he's so moved by a couple of T-shirts he's given me one of his. Maybe that was where one-for-one giving started for us.

So I kept going to Indo and travelling abroad through my uni studies. I finished my degree, and it was early 2007 that a friend showed me a YouTube clip of TOMS footwear's first shoe drop in Argentina. As soon as I watched it everything clicked. It was an "Oh my God" moment. Everything I'd been studying - international business and commerce - my love of travelling, clothing and helping out wherever you can, it all came together.

The business model made perfect sense, because it wasn't just about selling and it wasn't just about giving, and I thought it could work with school uniforms. You could make simple saleable items - get a good brand going, and create a sustainable way to give back to regions where school uniforms aren't accessible or available at all.

Within a fortnight of seeing that clip I'd made up my mind, and the name "Smile" was coined very early on in the piece - a year and a half before I'd even got the first samples done. In 2008 I'd started work in business banking at NAB. At that time I had a chat with a couple of buddies, put the Smile plan to them, and they said they'd jump in. We'd all started 9 to 5 work and were earning money and wondering about how to give some back. We thought we'd try the model of one-for-one.

In 2009, for annual leave we went and touched base with a few orphanages in Bali. It's hard

to make connections early on when you don't know anyone, but after you make those initial connections everyone's willing to help, and you find out where the areas of need are.

In 2010, we returned for a trial clothing drop. We still weren't trading yet, but we wanted to get some runs on the board and get a sense of what it was we were doing. So we gave out 350 school uniforms and T-shirts to kids in Bali and Lombok. A lot of the schools we went to on that trip we still go to now. It was amazing, and a good practical exercise. I didn't want the first "real" drop after we started the company to be really stressful because we hadn't done it before. That first clothing drop was comprised of some of the Smile team and our friends. The assistance we have received from our friends over the years is part of what has made us successful. Without their help, especially in the beginning, it would have been a harder path to tread.

In 2010, we started trading and it's grown to the level it is now. It's still technically a "hobby business", but that's soon to change, as I'm taking time out to concentrate on Smile for a year or so.

Through 2011 and 2012 we gave over 5000 school uniforms and T-shirts to kids in need. The focus is primarily in Indonesia - there'll always be an element of Indonesia in Smile because that's where it all started. We've gone on to do clothing drops in Cambodia, a mini clothing drop in Kenya, India, a three-day uniform drive in Sri Lanka. Some of these drops we've coordinated through partners.





We hope that Smile will get to the stage where we can't attend all the clothing drops ourselves, but that won't be a bad thing. If we can develop trusted relationships around the world with larger professional giving organisations, then that'll be great. We'll be doing the giving, but using these partners allows us to effectively help more kids.

We've tried a drop in Morocco. We flew across from Indo. We had 400 garments to give. I'd made brief contact with some people. We arrived in Marrakesh and they wouldn't let us through with the gear. They thought we were going to sell them, even though we had all the documentation, the invoices, etc. We were in the Customs office for over an hour, we showed them everything we did - photos, clips, the website, everything. We even offered them money. I thought, "Let's just do this, if that's what it takes". We'd travelled a long way. They told us to come back after the weekend. By the time we'd returned the garments had disappeared. That was one of the only times we've ever been really deflated. We posted a blog about the experience, and the support from our customers and people

who appreciate what we're doing really lifted us, so we're definitely going to try again for Morocco.

2013 is an exciting time - We still have not yet drawn a wage from Smile, it's still done in our spare time, but it's starting to weigh more heavily on the scale of commitment. There are five active members of the Smile family. There's myself, Shaun Denaro, Dylan Street, Bede Carmine and Daniel Chafer. Jesse Kirley rounds out the team on a less active basis, but has been there from the start. We're all buddies. We're at a point where we need members with active skill sets and who are keen to get it out there. Designers, photographers, marketing. All of our jobs cross-pollinate, we're in different parts of the world all doing our own thing.

This year we're also going to try to do a clothing drop in the NT. We've tried in the past couple of years to connect with the Indigenous community. There's lots of need in our country. I live in Peregian and surf Noosa so it's not a lot of hard luck around these parts when it comes to school uniforms - so I've needed a professional contact with the right people. It's been surprisingly difficult. We've tried

to hitch on to a few affiliations through people we know, but it's been hard to liaise. No fault of anyone's, just they've had their own thing going on. Some other friends got us in touch with crew working up near the cape, and nothing came of that either at this stage, but recently we've connected with someone who works in an extremely remote community with about 300 kids - the only way in's a flight from Darwin, so we're looking to do a clothing drop there by June 2013.

We've all balanced full-time jobs up until this point. If we can pay ourselves just a nominal wage - we don't need much - but if we can do Smile full-time we will be very happy. I often think, if we've done what we have in our hobby time - up late at night on our MacBooks - then what could we achieve full-time, how many kids can we help? The potential is endless; the more we sell, the more we give.

I know that if we just started the charitable side of Smile - if we just gave uniforms to kids around the world, without the saleable items to balance it, it wouldn't sustain. We could come to you and ask for donations for a uniform drive and you'd say, "It's

a great idea, here's the money". But if we called you back in three months and asked again, you'd be, "OK, but I gave 50 bucks recently". And if we rang you in another three months, you'd say "I can't keep doing it".

There's only so much charity people can give, and that's why the one-for-one model stood out for us. We looked at it and thought, "If we can fill the need that people have - people are going to buy boardshorts and walk shorts and T-shirts, etc... If we can just slide in there somewhere, and be a 'sustainable giving receptacle' then our job's done".

It's funny. Some people look at us like we're crazy, as for every garment we've got double the production cost... but one of the biggest things I've noticed in the past three years... when we started in 2010, I'd tell people about the idea and they'd say, "You guys are crazy. It's a nice idea, but I don't think it's going to work...". Nowadays we tell people what Smile's about and they absolutely get it and are into it. To hear that feedback means that sustainable giving, that one-for-one modality, any endeavour that incorporates something good into its DNA, is out there now. □

