



 Eureka moment: Erin Malone founded and runs Ballarat's Eureka Mums, taking donations of baby and children's items to give to families in need. Picture: Zoe Phillips.

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Ballarat's Eureka Mums is helping those in need through donated children's items

SARAH HUDSON, The Weekly Times

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FOR Ballarat's Erin Malone, it was a eureka moment.

The single mother of two had been trying to recycle or sell her children's clothing when she saw a magazine story about a group of Melbourne mums sourcing donated baby items then giving these to needy families.

On the spur of the moment, Erin decided to volunteer for the group.

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Since starting Eureka Mums out of her garage at the start of 2014, she has garnered 50 volunteers, and a committee of seven, who work with the Ballarat City Council's maternal child health nurses, as well as case workers from 20 welfare agencies that stretch across to Maryborough, Bacchus Marsh and Avoca.

Such is the demand for goods, this year Erin plans to extend further, potentially as far as Horsham.

Now working out of a warehouse in Sebastopol, where families donate goods and case workers pick up items to distribute, in the past 18 months Eureka Mums has helped about 500 families and given away 1500 bundles.

A bundle can be 100 items of clothing, or a linen bag full of sheets and blankets. A bundle of toys, for instance, can have 30 items, and a toddler feeding kit has cups, plates and cutlery. Donations are tailored for newborns to 10-year-olds.

While most donated items are delivered clean, Erin says since the Ballarat Good Guys donated a washing machine, any items not up to scratch are given a thorough clean.

She says according to the case workers, there is no particular type of family who receives the items.

“One mother was fleeing domestic violence and she left with nothing,” Erin says.

“There are low-income earners, those at risk of homelessness, families affected by alcohol or drugs, others have medical problems. There are so many different reasons.”

Erin says volunteers enjoy Eureka Mums because they are allowed to bring their children to the warehouse.

“I was initially attracted to St Kilda Mums because it gets mothers out of the house without separating them from their children and I thought it was a great way for my children to get a greater understanding of helping other people,” she says.

Of course, one of the biggest benefits is to the environment.

This year, St Kilda Mums and its two offshoots — Eureka Mums and Geelong Mums — won the overall prize in the Premier's Sustainability Awards.

“It's not something I thought about at the beginning, but when I started receiving items I realised it was a good question: where would these things go if not here?”



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