

**WHO STEPS
FORWARD
IN A CRISIS?**



The Australian aid worker was putting the final touches to a report that outlined the need to fund a clean water program in rural parts of the Philippines, when Typhoon Haiyan hit, killing 6,300 people and leaving 11 million others in various stages of desperation.

A senior manager for an NGO based in the Philippines, was in an instant torn from her desk job and deployed to a disaster zone. Almost immediately she was floundering; by the end of the first month she was exhausted and frustrated and meeting few of the NGO's objectives. She was working 18-hour days before collapsing into bed every night; she didn't really know any of the new batch of aid workers she was supposed to be supervising; and she had been unable to harness any of the local resources in a meaningful way.

When the same aid worker was deployed to lead a team responding to Cyclone Pam, which ripped through Vanuatu two years later, it was a completely different story. She transitioned into disaster mode seamlessly; she was allocating a set period everyday for reflection to review the work performed and to assess what needed to be done; she made getting to know the staff a priority so as to best harness their strengths and keep them motivated; and she had cultivated relationships with local leaders in order to maximise their support and resources. It was a transformation that until recently was rarely seen in humanitarian response.

'Traditionally, whenever there is a crisis of leadership in a humanitarian response, the solution has been to add in a system or a process,' explains veteran Save the Children aid worker, Stephen McDonald. 'But the problem wasn't the system! The problem was we weren't populating it with the people who have the appropriate experience, skills and behaviours.'

Then, as Deakin University's Dr Phil Connors remembers it, in 2011 Stephen McDonald knocked on his door with the proposition that would essentially change the way the humanitarian sector trained and operated forever.

Using seed funding from the Australian Aid Programme, in-kind support from Save the Children and Deakin University, and a lot of energy, goodwill and staff from partners such as World Vision and Oxfam, the Humanitarian Leadership Programme was born.

We started to map out literally on the back of an envelope how to develop what is now the Graduate Certificate of Humanitarian Leadership,' remembers Phil Connors. 'And in January 2012 we taught our first unit.'

In addition to addressing the skills required for leadership in a humanitarian crisis, it's the program's unique methodology and content, which includes a real-life simulation in Indonesia, that really sets it apart as a global leader in humanitarian education.

'People in the field are calling it the pre-eminent humanitarian leadership course in the world. People working in aid organisations have told me that they can tell who has done the course and who hasn't. They are just different.'

It's been five years since that first meeting, and Stephen McDonald and Phil Connors have now become co-directors of a ground-breaking centre which, with the backing of the IKEA Foundation, is taking the humanitarian leadership program to a whole new level which, in the next five years, will transform globally the humanitarian industry.

'There have been strong discussions within the global humanitarian sector about what needs to change to meet the growing demands,' says Phil Connors. 'We've got an increase in natural disasters due to climate change and there are now 60 million refugees in the world all requiring some kind of humanitarian response.'

So people have been asking, what needs to change? One of the key factors that has emerged is leadership.'

'The Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004 was the major trigger point,' adds Stephen McDonald. 'But the failure of leadership had been reflected across a whole number of crises going back to Rwanda in 1994 and even before that.'

Having established a leadership program with proven success in the region, Stephen McDonald, Phil Connors and Sophie Ferrand, Head of Teaching and Learning, under the auspices of Save the Children Sweden, last year submitted a proposal to the IKEA Foundation, an organisation dedicated to improving opportunities for children in some of the world's poorest communities by funding programs that create lasting change for their families and communities.

The proposition: to take Save the Children and Deakin's groundbreaking Humanitarian Leadership Programme to the rest of the world, overhauling the humanitarian sector, and impacting positively on countless lives in the process.

'This Centre is a unique and innovative opportunity to address the needs of the sector in terms of education and research for this region and beyond,' says Sophie Perrand.

The IKEA Foundation shared their vision and agreed to provide funding, which, in addition to the philanthropic funding matched by Deakin University, has resulted in the formation of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership.

'At the IKEA Foundation, we believe every child has the right to a safe place to call home and a quality education, and nothing threatens those rights more than humanitarian disasters,' says Per Heggenes, CEO of the IKEA Foundation.

'Children are extremely vulnerable in disasters, so it's crucial that aid workers have the skills and expertise



TACKLING
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necessary to protect, educate and save children when their world has been turned upside down.

'That's why we are supporting Save the Children and Deakin University's Humanitarian Leadership Programme to develop aid workers who can help children when they need it most.'

In addition to being the operating hub for the ever-evolving Humanitarian Leadership Programme, the Centre will manage scholarships and subsidies that allow greater access for students from developing countries, as well as oversee the expansion of the education and research program around the world.

Just as the KEA Foundation works in partnership with NGOs around the world, so does the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership. Currently, there are 17 organisations involved in the Humanitarian Leadership Programme. During the disaster simulations in Indonesia, of the 24 staff on site, only two are actually employed by Deakin University.

As well as participating in the mock disaster, the aid organisations contribute in other ways, including course design, guest lecturing, and mentoring.

Stephen McDonald and Phil Connors are already working on a global expansion of the program. Seventy-five per cent of the current course intake is comprised of international students, and the Centre aims to provide scholarships with an emphasis on developing nations. 'There's a graded process,' explains Phil Connors. 'There are those from large organisations in OECD countries, who receive fewer subsidies and then those from local organisations who receive greater support.'

We are also looking at the establishment of a scholarship fund, not just for the leadership program,

but also to support students in masters programs, research and so on,' adds Stephen McDonald. As a University that is dedicated to social impact, raising funds for scholarships and research in humanitarian leadership is a key priority for Deakin. Yet the aspirations of the Directors of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership extend well beyond the Australian region.

'There's about a quarter of a million people globally involved in full time humanitarian work,' explains Stephen McDonald. 'Then, if you think about those in leadership roles, there are at the least 20,000 people we need to reach. We obviously can't reach that volume through direct delivery ourselves, so what we need to do is work with the right kind of partners around the world who can support the delivery in other places.'

Currently, the Directors are in discussions with the University of Indonesia and the University of Nairobi who are keen to have the course taught at their institutions.

'We are in discussions about whether that'll be a partnership or whether the curriculum is replicated,' says Phil Connors.

'We're also in discussions with Action Contre le Faim in Paris and there might be a Francophone version between Paris and Dakar, Senegal, which will pick up the whole west and central Africa regions.'

Although when or where the next humanitarian crisis will occur is unknown, one thing is true: the creation of the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership may be our very best line of defence.

**Never stop discovering,
never stop learning.**

www.humanitarianleaders.org



Photo: Jan Garap/Noor for Save the Children



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