The Mobile Kidney Dialysis Group Traralgon Victoria Australia:
Suzi Picken, Bruce Bremner, Peter Maxwell, Vince Tripodi and Margaret Blanck
In January of 2011, Vince Tripodi shared an idea with his family and those he shared dialysis with. His vision was a Mobile Kidney Dialysis unit that could give dialysis patients opportunities for treatment in an environment beyond their local hospital and improve their overall health and wellbeing.

Vince, like all dialysis patients, was restricted to a regimented routine of dialysis treatment. He felt that at times this restriction meant that his opportunities for a change of scenery were compromised due to limited dialysis places statewide.

Vince’s thought –

“What if there was a bus that could go anywhere? A mobile dialysis unit, fully equipped with dialysis machines and knowledgeable and nurturing health practitioners, that could travel to various popular tourist destinations and be accessible for people who require dialysis treatment.”

His family thought this idea sounded too good to be true, ‘a pipe dream’, and wondered why it had not been thought of before. Vince’s enthusiasm radiated despite his family’s concern that the dream was just too big. His idea of quality time was to share experiences with family and friends and he believed that the location for these gatherings was restricted due to his treatment. The goal was to create an option for people like himself to receive a high level of care and treatment in different scenery.

He gathered a team. A small group of highly dedicated dialysis patients and carers formed the Mobile Kidney Dialysis (MKD) group. Suzi Picken, Bruce Bremner, Peter Maxwell, Margaret Blanck and Frances Tripodi believed that the idea had the potential to create a change. With this in mind, they frequently got together to discuss the possibilities and create a plan.

Letters seeking support were written to Kidney Health Australia (KHA) CEO Anne Wilson, dialysis patients within Latrobe Regional Hospital, Dialysis Units across Victoria, local businesses, companies, and philanthropic trusts. They were received with enthusiasm and the partnership with Kidney Health Australia was formed.

MKD, together with KHA and Bernadette Lewindon (Dialysis Nurse from Latrobe Regional Hospital), created presentations to be delivered at local, state and national health professional conferences. At the 2012 Renal Society of Australasia National Conference Suzi Picken and Bernadette Lewindon’s presentation was voted the Best Novice Podium Presentation. MKD also met with Federal and State politicians to introduce the project while local media was interested in running the story on television, radio and in print.

MKD hosted an Open Public Forum at Latrobe Regional Hospital inviting dialysis nurses and patients, health professionals, politicians, community members, KHA, friends and families. Following all the correspondence and events, interest and enthusiasm from local businesses and community members was evident.

The following months saw partnerships form with Kidney Health Australia and Jo Fairbairn, Community Education and Health Promotion Manager at KHA; Scott Grenda from Grenda Corporation, who pledged the vehicle to KHA; and Rhonda Renwick from Latrobe Valley Bus Lines, who pledged the transportation with their drivers and maintenance of the bus. Professor Peter Kerr, Head of Nephrology at Monash Medical Centre, would administer and arrange nursing staff, and renal technicians Tony Mosca and Colin Cutler would provide their expertise. Kidney Health Australia would transform the everyday school bus into a Mobile Satellite Dialysis Unit. The install would include three dialysis chairs and 3 Dialysis Machines donated by Fresenius. Grant applications were made to Perpetual Trustees by Kidney Health Australia and upon being successful were allocated to the bus fit-out.

The generosity and interest shown drove the MKD group to begin brainstorming opportunities within the local community. This gave the project momentum and engaged the community on many different levels. Local businesses, Sporting Clubs, Auxiliaries, the Traralgon Lions Club, and individuals raised funds and gave donations in kind for the project. A substantial amount has been raised.

The Mobile Kidney Dialysis group together with Kidney Health Australia decided that the money would be used for a scholarship program assisting dialysis patient and their families who cannot afford the costs associated with travel and accommodation. Upon the passing of Vince Tripodi in February of 2012, it was decided that this scholarship would be named The Vince Tripodi Travel Scholarship.

Throughout 2012 and 2013, the Mobile Kidney Dialysis group continued to liaise with the community and Kidney Health Australia in the development of the bus project. The bus travelled to NSW to be transformed by Busurb and managed by Express Coach Builders in Macksville and thus the project entered its final stages. The overall goal, a change for kidney dialysis patients, has been realised and whilst the achievements are greatly celebrated, sadly three members of the Mobile Kidney Dialysis group will not see the bus on the road. Vince Tripodi passed away in 2012 and Bruce Bremner and Suzie Picken passed away in 2013. They all knew that their idea of a dialysis bus would come to fruition and it gave them great joy. If not for their determination, hard work and unswerving belief that a project such as this could be successful the dream may not have been realised. The Big Red Kidney Bus is a lasting legacy for Vince, Bruce and Suzi, and a testament that if you put your mind to it, anything is possible!

It is with the support of the Kindred Spirits Foundation that this initiative can be celebrated with the local community in Traralgon and will continue to thrive and be acknowledged as a project that began in the Latrobe Valley.

The community engagement in the Big Red Kidney Bus project has led to an increased awareness of Kidney Health and an understanding of the challenges renal failure poses. The Bus will provide opportunities for a change of scenery for people on dialysis whilst maintaining required life-sustaining treatment. It is a positive change for the wellbeing of dialysis patients.

For more information visit Kidney Health Australia | www.kidney.org.au | 1800454363 | bigredkidneybus@kidney.org.au