

# Andrew answers the call

**D**r Andrew Clift sends a last minute email, reassuring me the scheduled phone interview can go ahead. "The riots we were told to expect this morning did not eventuate," he writes, from Honiara in the Solomon Islands.

"Although I'll be on call and I can't tie the phone up for too long."

A self-confessed drifter as a student in the early '90s at Gippsland's Leongatha High School, Andrew now calls Dean — a little town between Ballarat and Daylesford — home, but admits he rarely ever sees the place.

He's too busy saving lives and attending to the needs of the world's most desperate.

Right now, he's in the Solomons with the Australian Federal Police.

In the last few years, the 35-year-old doctor has variously worked in Africa with the United Nations, the slums of India, Indonesia and Egypt, and remote Aboriginal communities.

His latest project, with his wife, Dawn Cornish, is establishing an orphanage in Cambodia, called The Children's Sanctuary, which gives orphaned and abandoned children a loving and secure home until the age of 18.

The not-for-profit Sanctuary, established in November 2007 in Siem Reap, is a project that takes all the couple's money, and all of Dawn's time, with the couple even sacrificing their own relationship.

"I see Dawn at the orphanage every month. With my outreach clinics, it means living in different countries, let alone hemispheres, is not ideal. I don't know when we'll be back in Dean," says Andrew, with the drone of Honiara traffic in the background.

"But it's something we would do again and again and again.

"It's so gratifying. You can make such a huge difference to people's lives

Andrew Clift mixes small-town life with saving lives abroad, Sarah Hudson reports

in the world without really putting yourself though any serious discomfort. It is profound."

Right now the Sanctuary has 16 children, with nine staff.

While the plan was to expand, the couple's first priority is to provide the right environment for the malnourished, sick and exploited orphans.

"We have found that if we take too many children it gets impersonal and we can't provide the level of care we want. At the moment it's at its upper limits and is limited by funds.

"A little boy just this week is having an operation for a heart defect that costs US\$2000.

"We went in with our eyes wide open. We started our own organisation because we wanted the freedom to do it the way we wanted to do it. But it's a constant conflict between the needs of the children and the need for funds."

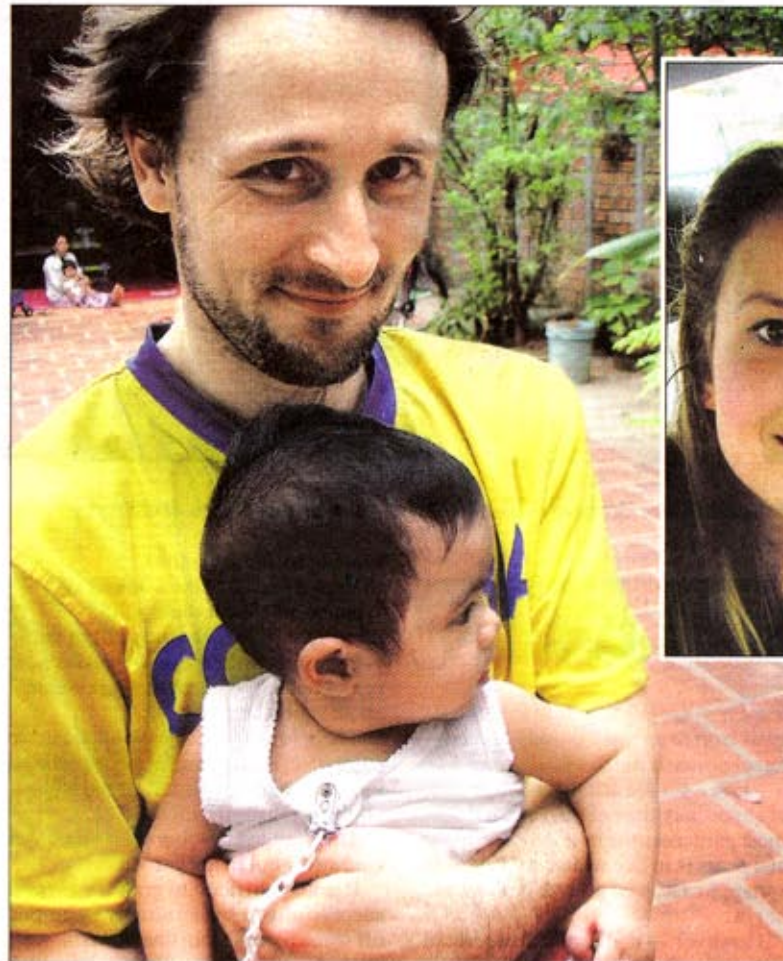
The Sanctuary costs up to US\$4000 to run each month, paid mainly by Andrew's wage.

Family and friends sponsor children and Andrew says neither Dawn or himself are "very good sales people; we're not comfy promoting the Sanctuary. Plus we're both too busy".

"Dawn is looking at a secondary source of income by selling fair trade baby clothes made by single mums.

"And Lyn Lea, a dear friend of ours from Ballarat, is helping with fundraising."

Surprisingly for such profound and inspiring work, Andrew had little vocation at school. "(At Leongatha



**Lots of love to give:** Dr Andrew Clift (left) with an orphan from The Sanctuary, Cambodia, and (inset) with wife Dawn Cornish on their wedding day.

High) I had no idea what I wanted to do. But I read an article about a surgeon in Somalia working under fire and it was inspiring.

While working in Africa in the mid-'90s, while he was still studying, his vocation crystallised.

"Africa was the complete opposite to everything I had. My family wasn't wealthy but we were safe and had free education and food on the table.

"There I saw people being murdered in front of me and dying of hundreds of different things. It was raw humanity."

After graduating he worked in Cairns, where he met Dawn, a nurse, who he describes as a saint.

The orphanage was Dawn's idea.

"She had been researching the idea and one day she just got the credit card and booked a ticket and went to Cambodia. "It could have been

anywhere in the world, but we had both been shocked at the deprivation there.

"If it was up to me we'd still be pontificating. She gave up a lovely house in Dean (that's now tenanted) for the dusty, humid, undeveloped city to try and do some good." Battling corruption and bureaucracy have just been some of the hurdles. Despite this, Andrew remains humble. "It's no big deal. We are just lucky in this country (Australia) and have access to everything. We are not suffering."

● **To sponsor a child or donate, visit [www.thechildrensanctuary.com](http://www.thechildrensanctuary.com)**