

Donations to dodgy charity float in limbo

by Andy Gough

\$320,000 raised in flood relief donations to an unregistered charity has been seized by the Queensland Office of Fair Trading and will be redistributed to legitimate organisations after a trio of conspiracy theorists were found guilty of collecting the donations illegally.

The bogus charity 'Aussie Helping Hands' was set up and run by David Oneeglio, Dorothy Greatorex and Hayley Birtles-Eades early in 2022, supposedly to assist flood-affected communities in northern New South Wales.

Oneeglio, known on social media as 'Dave Oneegs' is a major Australian conspiracy "influencer" who gained a following after emerging as one of the major anti-vaccine, anti-government and anti-lockdown voices during the pandemic.

He claimed that the floods had been deliberately caused by the government through cloud seeding.

Oneeglio posted images online in early 2022 of himself in flood waters implying he was saving flood victims with the assistance of a jet ski provided by his close friend, controversial celebrity chef Pete Evans.

He subsequently posted daily videos of himself sitting in his vehicle talking about allegedly helping and delivering donations such as generators and meals for flood victims, while



David Oneeglio aka Dave Oneegs, Dorothy Greatorex aka Dotti Janssen and Hayley Birtles-Eades, the three opportunists behind the unregistered charity 'Aussie Helping Hands' that raised over \$300,000 for flood relief in the Northern Rivers in 2022. The funds were seized by authorities, but questions remain whether the donations will ever reach their intended recipients, with the funds now in the hands of the Queensland government.

vocally criticising legitimate charities and the government response.

Aussie Helping Hands, at the time, claimed to provide a flood relief alternative to the "establishment" charities, capitalising on hesitation and mistrust of the establishment and offering a grassroots and self-sourced alternative method of chipping in.

Pleas for donations were made across a variety of social media platforms and websites. Vocal supporters of the scam included retired Qantas pilot Graham Hood and child abduction specialist Adam Whittington.

Lismore City councillor Elly Bird said that at the height of the floods, Aussie Helping Hands supporters ambushed the Resilient Lismore Facebook group, used by more than 30,000 people trying to co-ordinate disaster relief, and accused

organisers of being part of a government conspiracy.

Failure to register Aussie Helping Hands as a charity led Queensland's Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to commence an investigation in April 2022 and, at that time, it froze the \$320,000 in donations in bank accounts held by the trio.

Oneeglio pled guilty to two counts of breaching the *Collections Act*. He was also charged with failing to produce requested information and records to account properly for money and equipment received.

The court fined him \$750 and the Queensland Public Trustee will be tasked with redistributing the monies to "appropriate charities".

Self-described "influencer" Birtles-Eades was charged with one count of conducting of unlawful appeals for support in breach of the *Collections Act*, ordered to

pay recognition of \$400 and given a six-month good behaviour bond with no conviction recorded. Dorothy Greatorex (aka Dotti Janssen) faced court last October, pled guilty to raising funds without a license and was fined \$795 plus court costs.

"We know there are often opportunistic scammers following natural disasters such as flooding, cyclones and bushfires. And we know that when communities are in need, Australians dig deep. However, you need to know where your money is going before you donate.

"Go on-line and check if the charity is registered before you donate," Fair Trading Commissioner Victoria Thomson said.

But the big question nobody seems to have an answer to is: what method is the Queensland Public Trustee going to use to determine where the

confiscated donations are to be redistributed?

Will those funds end up with the intended recipients, NSW flood victims, or will they instead end up in the coffers of Queensland-based charities?

Lismore MP Janelle Saffin has written to the Queensland Attorney-General Yvette D'Ath to request consideration that the funds relating to Aussie Helping Hands be dispersed to like charities in Northern NSW.

"Having alerted police to this scam, and I thank them for their prompt action, I would hope that funds could be distributed to flood victims here in the Northern Rivers, which was the stated intention of the fraudulent fundraising. Many local people gave funds to this fake charity," Ms Saffin said.

But with penalties that are barely a slap on the wrist for

the organisers, it seems that in November last year, Dorothy Greatorex announced the fake charity was "back in business" rebranded as 'Aussie Helping Hearts' and published the following statement as "lead facilitator":

"Unfortunately, we had to pause all activities until an investigation occurred into accusations of misconduct and misappropriation of funds. To be expected, we have been cleared of any wrongdoing (with the exception of receiving a fine for raising funds without a sanction).

"With the new name of Aussie Helping Hearts, we are now relaunching..."

A search for Aussie Helping Hearts on the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) website returned no results.

You can check a charity at: www.acnc.gov.au/charity/charities

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