

Ms. Viv Kartsounis

Founder of Shoes for Planet Earth

Can you imagine life with no shoes? No shoes to protect you from the heat or cold, from disease and rough ground. No shoes to wear to school or work, or to play your favourite sport. We take having a pair of shoes for granted, and we each have more than one pair!

A pair of shoes can change a life! They can give hope, self-worth and dignity, and the courage to step outside with pride and confidence. Shoes can improve both the mental and physical health of each and every soul.

Changing a life with a pair of shoes – this is where my dream started ten years ago – knowing that I could make a difference one pair of shoes at a time.

My name is Viv Kartsounis. I was born in South Africa and I was born to run! I ran competitively throughout my school years and at Uni and I have always found running liberating and great fun. In 1995, my young family and I moved from South Africa to Malaysia, where we lived for 6 wonderful years before immigrating to Sydney, Australia, in 2002.

I have always loudly shared my passion for running, establishing my own running groups for both adults and children in Malaysia and Australia. With my passion I found it very easy to inspire and motivate others to join me and together we ran along roads and discovered new and exciting bush and jungle trails. The benefits to all were huge and often a tear was shed as fears were conquered and medals displayed.

In 2004, and new to Australia, my life changed when I met Nick Drayton, a seasoned ultra-runner. It was him who introduced me to ultra-running and encouraged me to try out for the Australian women's 100km running team. To my surprise I ran well and was given a place to run overseas in 2006, 2007 and 2008. These experiences sealed the bond I had for God's Country and I ran proudly for Australia.

AUSTRALIA DAY Ambassador

In 2009 my running found new purpose and intention. A visit to South Africa to run the Comrades Marathon took me back to the very front row of poverty. A vision for the future became clear and exciting – getting shoes onto bare feet across the planet and in October 2009 we formed the charity "Shoes for Planet Earth".

Our first box of shoes went to runners in South Africa but we soon realised that the high cost of international shipping was more than we could afford. Rather than abandon our vision we "looked local" to see if there was a need for shoes amongst the needy and homeless in Sydney and throughout Australia. We have never looked back.

"Shoes for Planet Earth" took its first steps slowly but then it started to run...

To date we have:

- Changed over 80,000 lives through the gift of a pair of shoes.
- Given shoes to the homeless, sporting communities, natural disaster victims, orphans, church groups and people in need.
- Sent shoes to 24 countries other than Australia and we continue to grow.
- Promoted walking for Sydney's homeless.

Our charity has three primary goals:

- 1. To collect and send sports shoes to people in need throughout Australia
- 2. To change lives by promoting a healthy lifestyle through exercise.
- 3. To encourage recycling to reduce landfill.

There are not enough hours in a day to answer all life's calls, but running keeps me sane, fit, happy and healthy so that I can continue to do the work that God has put me here to do.