

MEET THE CORONA ANGELS

REAL-LIFE

SAVING CHRISTMAS



A GLOBAL PANDEMIC WON'T STOP THEM FROM KEEPING THE FESTIVE SPIRIT ALIVE

Nothing brings people together quite like a crisis – and 2020 has certainly been a year we won't forget.

When COVID-19 hit earlier this year, the world went into panic-mode. Supermarkets were cleaned out and people were told to stay at home. Mixing with loved ones was banned, parents were advised not to send their children to school and workplaces were shutdown.

And yet, in the midst of all the chaos, 31-year-old Aamir Qutub from Geelong, Victoria, discovered that one thing had remained unscathed by the pandemic – good old Aussie mateship.

It all started when Aamir and his wife, Sarah, 30, found themselves in a toilet roll crisis.

"When we ran out of toilet paper, Aamir rang his sister, who lives three blocks

away, and she helped us," says Sarah.

The couple, who are on good terms with their neighbours, could have asked them for help, but felt that it was a little embarrassing.

"We felt people want to help, they just don't know where and how to," Aamir tells New Idea.

After talking, Sarah set her husband – who runs a web and app development company – a challenge: create something useful for the community.

Soon, Aamir had a brainwave – he would build an app that would connect people who could use a helping hand with those willing to give.

After investing a whopping \$100,000 of his own money and spending countless hours bringing his idea to life, Aamir launched the Angels Next Door app, which uses a strict screening process

to anonymously connect registered users seeking help with a real-life 'angel' in their area.

It started in Geelong and quickly expanded to include Melbourne, followed by the rest of the nation. Before they knew it, an army of almost 10,000 helpers all across Australia had signed up to the app to give and receive assistance with all kinds



Aamir enlisted Rory and Kim to help launch the app that's now assisted thousands of Australians.



of tasks – from preparing and delivering home-cooked meals to grocery shopping, walking the dog and putting the bins out.

Aamir was gobsmacked to realise that since the app launched in April, he has succeeded in connecting 50,000 Aussie helpers with neighbours hemmed in by illness or incapacity.

"There are amazing people in the community who are willing to help, who can be our angels," says Aamir.

He even found his own team of angels in the form of entrepreneur Rory Costelloe and *Australian Idol* star Kim Cooper, who both helped Aamir to spread the word.

Now, countless nameless and faceless angels spring into action within 30 minutes of

a call-out for help being made.

"It is giving a sense of community, purpose, people are happier when they have helped someone," says Aamir.

Now the app is helping keep Christmas alive, with people assisting their neighbours by sending cards, decorating a tree or arranging deliveries.

"Our family is in India, so we can't meet them for Christmas," says Aamir. "It's the same for many families who have been separated due to COVID. It's been a year from hell and little acts of kindness can make a big difference.

"There are so many people who are lonely and holidays make it harder. Christmas is a time for giving, and that's exactly what our angels want to do."

While COVID isolated, Aamir brought back mateship by creating an app that connects those needing help with local 'angels'.

