

SAVA supports the Street Sleeper Project

This winter, the Southern African Vinyls Association (SAVA) will be helping the Street Sleeper project keep hundreds of homeless people warm and dry by donating a much-needed industrial sewing machine used to convert used PVC billboards into waterproof, windproof survival sleeping bags.



Oliver Brain demonstrates how the PVC sleeping bag works

Practical help and support where it counts

"We have begun the process of supporting social entrepreneur Oliver Brain with his 'From Billboard to Bag' initiative about a year ago. We were impressed by this young man's passion for the less fortunate, and the practical solution he found for recycling billboards that were destined for landfill," says SAVA CEO, Delanie Bezuidenhout.

Apart from donating the sewing machine, SAVA has also been assisting Brain with practical tips on occupational health and safety, and has helped to raise awareness of the Street Sleeper project to the media, including interviews this past month on Espresso (SABC3), 5FM, and Radio 702.

According to Brain "the piece on 5FM received some great feedback, and has raised a lot of awareness". The Espresso breakfast show conducted a sunrise interview on the roof and Oliver even managed to answer a couple of questions while sitting in the bag. "However, the best part of it all was gifting the bags used on the show to Vuyani and his wife, two homeless people who sleep on the grass directly opposite the studio", Brain said.

The Street Sleeper Project

The original idea of the Street Sleeper project was to create a sturdy and sustainably-sourced urban survival sleeping bag that would last a long time, stand up to the elements, and double as a daytime pack which homeless people could use to carry belongings.

"Street Sleeper was conceptualised because I was constantly finding myself in a situation that I am sure many people have been in - I wanted to help homeless people, but didn't have an easy enough platform to do it from. So I decided to create this platform for people and focused on one element: providing temporary shelter.

It was then that I noticed our city is plastered with PVC advertising billboards that can't be recycled after use. I had found my material - it was plentiful, flexible, waterproof, and strong and wanted to be upcycled. Street Sleeper brings together two of my passions, which are sustainable innovation and simple design", Brain explains.

Recycling PVC destined for landfill

To date, a total of 794 bags have already been made, which accounts to around 3,200m² of PVC billboards which were recycled. Of this, almost half of the bags were made with the machine that SAVA donated. "It's been really fantastic and makes the work so much better and easier, and makes the bags much more robust," he says.

Get involved

There are various ways in which the bags are distributed to the homeless in Cape Town, ranging from feeding centres, to volunteers who hand the sleeping bags out and use the opportunity as a way to engage with the less fortunate in their community.

Individuals and corporates can also buy sleeping bags to hand out at traffic lights instead of giving money to beggars, or can donate R150 via the [www. streetsleeper.org](http://www.streetsleeper.org) website, which will be used to gift a sleeping bag to somebody in need.

Concludes Bezuidenhout: "We want to help the Street Sleeper project reach their goal of having made and distributed 1 500 bags by the end of the winter. The number of homeless people in South Africa is constantly on the rise. More than just a product, Street Sleeper is a social enterprise that upcycles PVC advertising billboards into survival sleeping bags for the homeless, providing protection against the elements at night and doubling as storage backpacks during the day. Using a combination of ingenuity and clever design, Street Sleeper is working to tackle challenges faced by the homeless."

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