



## Richard Buxton: on a journey for a cure

**Managing Director of Melbourne-based Buxton Construction and Property Group, Richard Buxton has a love and passion for adventure. Since 2001 he has focused this passion – and his boundless energy and determination – towards raising awareness and significant funds to find a cure for dementia.**

It all began with a desire to replicate the voyage undertaken by explorer Matthew Flinders over 200 years ago. Richard has since circumnavigated the Australian coastline – a journey of 12,000km – twice. It started with a flying journey around Australia in 2002 and 2003, followed by a voyage by yacht from 2005 to 2007. His adventures have now culminated in a book *If Matthew Flinders Had Wings*. Richard has made a significant commitment to our organisation – he has pledged the first \$500,000 in proceeds from the book to go to Alzheimer's Australia to fund research into a cure for dementia.

### When did you get the idea to travel around Australia to raise money and awareness about dementia?

**Richard:** My dream of circumnavigating the country started well before I had a connection with Alzheimer's disease or mental health issues in general. But it was in 2001 when I was planning my trip to fly

around the country that a friend suggested I use my journey as a way to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and funds for research. I thought at the time: 'There's something in this.' And there was. It turned out we had a great deal of media coverage on that first trip ... in print, radio and television news around the country about the flight, Alzheimer's disease and our plan to raise money for research.

### When you got back from your flight around Australia your involvement with dementia became personal – what happened?

**Richard:** When I got back my mother was not as well as when I left. She had become quite ill. It turned out she had dementia and other health complications.



Mum was always so mentally active her whole life. To see her suffer and lose herself and her lifestyle disappearing was hard. It really affects you. For her to then confuse me with someone else was upsetting. And the fighting and aggravation that used to come and go – from her frustration at what was happening to her – I wanted that to go away.

It made me realise that you can take medication for a number of ailments and illnesses to extend life – but once your brain is gone, you go too.

**Following your mother’s illness, you became even more motivated to find a cure for dementia? Is this when you began planning your second trip?**

**Richard:** Yes, around that time I was also opening Rylands, our independent retirement facilities. Combined with what Mum was going through with dementia, my travels around the country and my business entering into a new area of national retirement homes – it all came together.

In 2003 I realised I wanted to make a bigger thing of it. I wanted to take a second journey around Australia – this time sailing – to raise even more funds for dementia research. So that’s exactly what we did in 2005 to 2007. And we had fantastic support from other companies to take that message around the country. Now I’m even more passionate about it. I enjoy it. I love raising money. And if I can also make it pleasurable by doing things I love, all the better.

**Do you think the corporate sector could do more to raise awareness about dementia?**

**Richard:** We certainly have to get more corporations on board. There’s long been favour by corporations for other causes, such as cancer, heart disease etc. And yes all illnesses deserve attention but dementia has always been put in the background. But I think corporations are now at the point where they know the illness is important and needing support. And the more we can get from corporations to support and participate in this cause – if we can get just five per cent of corporate and philanthropic donations – the greater the chance we have of finding a cure.

**In the past Alzheimer’s Australia Vic has had trouble finding people, particularly those who have a high profile, willing to make public their personal experience with dementia – whether it’s their partner, parent or grandparent. Why do you think that is?**



**Richard:** I think it’s about a lack of understanding and awareness. And it’s not just about dementia – it’s about mental illnesses in general I think. They’re all connected, but there is a sense that it should be swept under the carpet. I have personally had epilepsy all my life and I’m happy to talk openly about it.

But once you have knowledge, like the technical knowledge I’ve gained over the past five years about dementia ... once you’ve got that knowledge about how the brain works and why these illnesses occur, and how you get it, you want to do something about it and speak up.

In isolation, general awareness about all mental illnesses is spread thinly. But I really think if we all put in together and use our voices to speak up about dementia and mental illnesses I think we can make a difference and have an impact.

**So what do you see as the answer to the dementia epidemic?**

**Richard:** When it comes down to it, it’s about money. Researchers have an idea on how to get there, on how to find a cure for dementia, but they haven’t got the money. We need to find the money. We need to fund research for a cure, so this illness won’t be a problem for future generations.

Copies of Richard Buxton’s book *If Matthew Flinders Had Wings* are now on sale. To purchase a copy go to [www.epsilonresearch.com.au](http://www.epsilonresearch.com.au) and fill in an online order form, email [emoffat@buxtongroup.com.au](mailto:emoffat@buxtongroup.com.au) or call Lib Moffat on 03 9644 7000.

Alzheimer’s Australia thanks Richard for his significant commitment to supporting dementia research in Australia.

