



# 18 years of top-quality care for kids

By **PHILIPPA DUNCAN**

WATCHING Peter Crosswell joke with two children, their heads bald in the tell-tale sign of cancer, it is easy to see why he has dedicated 18 years to raising millions of dollars to help put a smile of the faces of Tasmanian youngsters with the disease.

When he resigns as Camp Quality's state manager next month, he will leave knowing he has helped hundreds, maybe thousands, of children and their families.

Mr Crosswell is still amazed at the courage and humour shown by children with cancer.

There was the little boy losing his hair, who joked that it was "fantastic, because Mum won't be on my back all the time to wash it".

And there was a blind girl,

born with a brain tumour, who used to bang Mr Crosswell on the back of his legs with her white cane and tell jokes about her "special torch" at home that did not need batteries.

"They don't take life for granted," Mr Crosswell said.

"They grow up very quickly and they have an intense sense of humour. They are extremely inspiring."

Having a child with cancer is hard, with statistics showing one-third of parents break up.

Mr Crosswell remembers finding a crying father in Camp Quality's carpark.

The man's three-year-old son had been diagnosed with cancer 10 months earlier. The boy had been put in the palliative care ward and was given three months to live.

"He wanted to take the fam-

ily to Queensland so the little boy could pat a dolphin," Mr Crosswell said.

The next day Camp Quality had the family on a plane to the Sunshine State. Five days later the boy was dead.

In Tasmania each year about 30 children are diagnosed with cancer, and on average six will die. In the week leading up to Christmas, eight children were diagnosed, six of them babies.

"Relatively early on I thought 'I don't know if I am going to be able to cope with this'," Mr Crosswell said.

Then came the Port Arthur massacre in 1996.

Mr Crosswell was in the Broad Arrow Cafe with two women from interstate who were running puppet shows to raise money for Camp Quality.

He pulled his two com-

panions to the floor and tried to protect them with his body, in the process being wounded by Martin Bryant, who killed 35 people.

Mr Crosswell was awarded a bravery medal for his actions.

The experience taught him the pain of being told "it is time to move on", his marriage broke down, and he lost two good friends. But it also helped him deal with parents who have lost a child.

"This has been the best job in the world," Mr Crosswell said. "The perception is that there is a lot of negativity about the job, but it's the opposite. I got a lot more out of it than I put in."

The 60-year-old does not know what is next. However, one thing is certain: there will be children involved.



**CARING AND SHARING:** Peter Crosswell, centre, spends some time with two-year-old Ella Van Den Heuvel, left, of Risdon Vale, and 10-year-old Corey Attard, of Cuprona. Mr Crosswell is resigning after 18 years with Camp Quality. Picture: KIM EISZEL