



In 2020, as the pandemic swept the globe, the purpose of the 500 Supporters Group's work for the Ruben Centre was put into perspective. The support from over 200 financial members, sponsors and other friends was never more needed.

With Melbourne in lockdown last May, it was decided that the annual AFL event would need to go online. After consulting with inaugural speaker and AFL Legend, Kevin Sheedy, and filmmakers Richard Keddle and Archie Chew (great friends of Ruben), "the back bar" was born.

Filmed in "the back bar" at PJ O'Brien's and hosted by Leon Wiegard, the one hour "special" comprised an impressive footy panel including, Sheeds, Jeff Kennett and Jonathan Brown, with cameos from champion Ruben friends Simon and Justin Madden, Tom Mitchell, and Jobe Watson. A report from Ruben updated viewers on the effect of the pandemic on the people of Mukuru and the Ruben school, its health clinic and associated projects.

While all enjoyed watching Sheeds and Jeff going head to head and learning about Brownie's family connection to Ruben, the best thing about the event was the record \$570,000 raised.

By November, the Committee had gained the confidence to "go live" on Zoom with the annual Spring Racing event on Melbourne Cup Eve. With great support from the VRC's Ambassador at Large, Joe McGrath, the event featured Cup-winning jockey, Wayne Harris, leading trainers Ciaran Maher, Peter Moody, Lindsey Smith and Archie Alexander, race horse owners Terry Henderson and Gerry Ryan and international racing expert, Francesca Cumani. Leon was ably assisted by podcast partner, Sam Kekovich. It was one of the Group's most successful Spring Racing events, raising over \$200,000.

The 10-member 500 Supporters' committee devotes its energy, drive and network towards supporting Ruben and their unwavering determination is inspirational.

Despite significant challenges, through sheer perseverance **an outstanding fundraising result of over \$750,000 was achieved.**

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