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Ending Homelessness in Western Australia

Contents

Parity
Australia's national homelessness publication

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Contributions to *Parity* are welcome. Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor. Contributions can be emailed to ***parity@chp.org.au*** in Microsoft Word or rtf format. If this option is not possible, contributions can be mailed to CHP at the above address.

Cover artwork

Where's My Mia Mia, created by Nerolie Bynder.
See page 6 for more details.

The views and opinions expressed in *Parity* are not necessarily those of CHP.

Foreword from the Minister for Homelessness

Hon John Carey MLA, Minister for Homelessness

The past 12 months have been a challenging time for people experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness, with the COVID-19 pandemic placing significant strain on our housing system. These challenges are felt across the entire sector, particularly by the organisations and staff, who provide invaluable support to vulnerable Western Australians.

I want to assure the Western Australian community: the McGowan Government is committed to tackling this issue head on. That's why we have established a new portfolio dedicated entirely to addressing homelessness in Western Australia.

As the Minister appointed to oversee this new portfolio, I know the responsibility that now rests on my shoulders to drive positive change. As the Member for Perth, it's an issue I am familiar with and passionate about, having spent a lot my time seeking to improve the supports available to people sleeping rough in the Perth central business district.

As I have done in the Housing portfolio, I will be looking closely at every aspect of service delivery and seeking to reform by identifying gaps in support, and ensuring the significant resources being thrown at this challenge are delivering the best results.

The McGowan Government continues to work closely with community sector partners to respond to emerging needs in the community, drawing on available data and research, to strengthen our approaches.

This edition of *Parity* builds on the existing evidence base, which includes the extensive consultation and research undertaken during development of *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030*.

I want to thank the organisations and individuals who have shared their successes, their lessons and their knowledge, for this edition of *Parity*. I would particularly like to acknowledge the contribution of those with lived experience of homelessness.

The Strategy, and the Action Plan 2020–2025, was developed in partnership with the community services sector, peak bodies, state and local government agencies and people with lived experience of homelessness; and the McGowan Government is committed to continuing this collaborative approach in development and delivery of new initiatives that support implementation of the Strategy.

The McGowan Government has committed over $100 million in new investment to support implementation of the Strategy. This includes planning, design and construction of Common Ground facilities in Perth and Mandurah, the Housing First Homelessness Initiative, the Local Government Partnership Fund for Homelessness, and Boorloo Bidee Mia, which opened in August 2021 to provide immediate accommodation while longer-term initiatives are implemented.

Homelessness Week 2021 walking tour

While significant progress has been made, we still have a long way to go.

Homelessness is not an individual challenge; it is a challenge for all of us. It requires new partnerships, innovative thinking and a significant effort from the entire community. I thank all of you from across the community who are committed to this important work. It is through a collective effort that we can succeed at ensuring that everyone in our community is supported and has a safe place to call home.

Director General's Foreword

Mike Rowe, Director General, Department of Communities

Over the last few years, the COVID-19 global pandemic has brought unprecedented and unforeseen challenges and has highlighted the importance of ensuring that every person in Western Australia has a safe place to call home.

I would like to acknowledge the work of frontline workers in keeping people safe and all workers who have been keeping our services running throughout these difficult times, ensuring that our most vulnerable members of our community have access to support and essential services.

Since starting as the Director General at the Department of Communities, I am constantly reminded of the dedication of our staff and the importance of the work that they do.

Homelessness is a complex issue that involves many contributing factors and requires a person-centred response that will support individuals and families in ways that work for them. It is essential that we continue to listen to the voices of those with a lived experience of homelessness as we develop and implement initiatives and services. Stories of people who have experienced homelessness, such as those shared in this edition, help us develop a fuller understanding of how people become homeless and the kind of supports that make a difference.

Communities is committed to leading the work of *All Paths Lead to a Home*: Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030 and we will continue to work in partnership with all levels of government, the business sector, and the community services sector to progress its priorities.

As part of this work, I co-chair the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group, which provides valuable advice from across the sector to ensure we keep improving, adapting and refining our responses. People at risk of or experiencing homelessness often access a range of supports and services delivered by multiple agencies, so the Homelessness Working Group will also encourage alignment of multiple strategies and priorities to support this.

Communities provides more than $100 million each year to a broad range of community sector organisations to deliver specialist homelessness services. This includes family and domestic violence crisis accommodation and support, homelessness accommodation and support, outreach, and housing and tenancy support workers. Strengthening commissioning and contracting of these services is a priority of the Strategy and Communities has commenced the transition to a place-based, person-centred approach.

The Homelessness Strategy also has an overarching commitment to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within the homeless population and recognises that a culturally responsive approach is required to address this.

Communities is working with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to develop and deliver culturally appropriate responses for Aboriginal people. This includes new investments that support implementation of the Strategy such as the Housing First Homelessness Initiative and Boorloo Bidee Mia. The Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations Strategy will provide valuable guidance and support as we continue our efforts to strengthen Aboriginal-led service delivery.

My own experience co-chairing the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group and speaking to people at events such as the Vinnies CEO sleep-out and the recent Youth Homelessness Roundtable has re-affirmed that we are on the right track to tackle this challenge. I am in no doubt that the right people are at the table to bring the knowledge, experience and commitment to end homelessness in Western Australia.

Editorial

Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons

Western Australia (WA) has been building to this moment of ambition for homelessness service delivery for some years. There has been much hard work in advocacy and practice development, as well as strong and respectful collaboration between government and the wider homelessness and social housing sectors in WA contributing to the current strategy.

Ongoing advocacy by WA specialist homelessness services and bodies like Shelter WA has been crucial, as has the advocacy of the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH). Service models have been developed and improved based on rigorous research and evaluation, as exemplified by the *Perth Zero* and *20 Lives 20 Homes* Housing First projects, and other innovative housing projects like the Entrypoint program and Common Ground.

The Western Australian Government's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness, *All Paths Lead to a Home*, provides the foundation for a paradigm shift in the response to homelessness in that state and beyond. *All Paths Lead to a Home* is unique among homelessness strategies in clearly articulating an ambition and commitment to actually end homelessness in WA. This contrasts with other government policy frameworks, whether they be national like 2008 *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* or state based like the 2021 South Australian *Future Directions for Homelessness in SA*, which have had the lesser ambition to reduce homelessness by providing better and more effective prevention and other service responses.

The policy recognises the urgent need to prioritise ending Aboriginal homelessness. Along with the rest of the country, the numbers of Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness in WA is out of all proportion to their percentage of the state's population. It is to be lauded that improving Aboriginal wellbeing is the first Priority Action set out in *All Paths Lead to a Home*. WA is fortunate to have strong and effective Aboriginal organisations like Noongar Mia Mia who have developed and implemented Aboriginal Housing First models and Aboriginal Cultural Frameworks for appropriately responding to Aboriginal homelessness.

It will be important that *All Paths Lead to a Home* fully fulfills its intention to embrace a Housing First approach and strategy as fundamental to the service response to homelessness in WA. The commitment to the implementation of Housing First Principles in the service response to homelessness, inherently depends on government providing access to housing that people requiring the support of Housing First programs can afford, as well as the scale of and duration of support needed for people to sustain housing over the long-term.

Access to housing is at the heart of any meaningful and effective approach to ending homelessness. WA is not immune to the effects of endemic housing inequality, with increasing challenges for Western Australians on low incomes finding housing they can afford, adding to homelessness in the state. Addressing this challenge fundamentally relies on the provision of adequate social housing stock to meet the needs of people squeezed out of the private market. The recent initiatives of the WA Government to increase the levels of social housing are welcome pointers in the right direction, though continued investment from the WA and Australian Governments will be needed to achieve the Strategy's ambition of ending homelessness.

As always, government responsibility for social housing is the uninvited guest at the table in all discussions of the role of government in ending homelessness. When all levels of government collectively and fully embrace this responsibility, and funding for the support needed by our most vulnerable is ongoing, realistically homelessness can become a singular, brief and well supported experience, right across our country.

Acknowledgements

CHP would like to acknowledge and thank the Western Australian Government through the Department of Communities for their sponsorship support for this

edition of *Parity*. This support was the foundation for the planning and development of this edition. Likewise, CHP would like to thank the sponsorship support provided by project partners, Shelter WA, Anglicare WA, St Vincent de Paul WA, Mission Australia WA, Noongar Mia Mia, Centrecare WA, RUAH, St Patricks Community Support Centre, the WA Alliance to End Homelessness, The Centre for Social Impact the University of Western Australia, Accordwest and the Salvation Army WA.

Special thanks to all the members of the edition Steering Committee/Reference Group for their dedicated, active and robust participation in the lengthy discussions and deliberations on contentious issues.

Finally, particular thanks to John Berger from WAAEH, Michelle Mackenzie from Shelter WA and Paul Flatau from the Centre for Social Impact for their unstinting support at all stages of the preparation of this edition.

This edition of *Parity* is itself a reflection of the results of this ongoing partnership between the State Government and the sector.

Where's My Mia Mia by Nerolie Bynder (cover art)

The cover artwork for this edition of *Parity* is *Where's My Mia Mia*, created by Nerolie Bynder, a proud Badimia-Noongar-Yamatji woman. Her style is contemporary Aboriginal Art. She creates custom art on canvas, murals, sandart — anything arty! Nerolie can be found on Facebook or Linkedin.

The leaves in the upside down V-shape represent a mia mia. The yellow spirits outside the mia mia are the homeless people or the disconnected spirits of the homeless, surrounding the mia mia, longing for one to call their own. They are reaching out for help to the services around them and above them, the services are supporting them, but sadly it takes a long time and the spirits are left to float around from place to place.

In the centre it represents home to our people. We have a connection to one place but also to many. We branch out from family or place to place.

The big waterhole. That's our country. Our home, our connection to our spirit. But we also can go wandering and go be in other areas and still be accepted as our home. We connect to many many people all over.

The three spirits represent the people on their own heart journey, spirits from the past, the present and the future. As they had to travel through the stages of this journey from homelessness to having a happy home of their own.

The yellow and blue dots represent Shelter WA and acknowledges the 40 years they have given.

Below is our peaceful land our Boodja which we all have to live on, our foundation. Which we all hope everyone has a place to call home on.

The trees on country represents the land and the strong connection within us to country.

Our family roots, the symbol that shows our interconnection to each other.

The spirits of life flows by Jade Dolman (page 11)

The two spirits are flowing like water like in life, they continue to flow and keep moving forward. They are people whose spirits have been down but they found their strength and now they have strong foundations. One represents the spirits of the people who need help and the other is the spirits of the people who help others. Each spirit is strong, maintaining balance through sharing of information, because they never give up, the long-term goal can now be achieved.

The spirits both continue to reach out and grow. The waterholes and fires connect them to all the places that they got help from throughout their journeys.

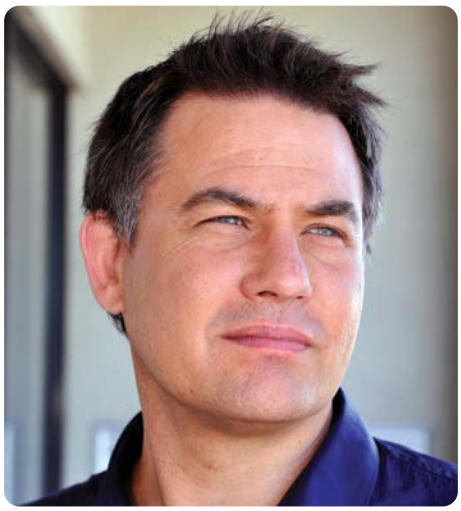
A symbol of starting over, moving forward and looking for growth and change.

Life. They all find their way and are all in balance with each other in the end. The two spirits are flowing like water like in life, they continue to flow and keep moving forward. They are people whose spirits have been down but they found their strength and now they have strong foundations.

Jade Dolman

Introduction

John Berger, Executive Officer of the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness,
Paul Flatau, Centre for Social Impact, The University of Western Australia
and Michelle Mackenzie, CEO Shelter WA



In December 2012, *Parity* published its first ever Western Australian (WA) issue. It was, as its Introduction pointed out, 'a bumper issue'. The WA *Parity* issue contained a detailed retrospective of homelessness service delivery in the decades prior to 2012 by two great stalwarts of WA homelessness policy in Genevieve Errey and Helen Miskell. It was an issue filled with optimism. The WA homelessness sector had experienced a period of innovation in service delivery and growth in funding linked to the Rudd Government's national homelessness strategy, the Road Home, and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.

The advent of the Abbott Government quickly ended the concerted, collaborative national frameworks that had developed focused on aspirational homelessness reduction targets (but an underdeveloped monitoring and evaluation framework). Nevertheless, the WA service system continued to innovate. We saw fresh impetus from the introduction of Housing First programs by homelessness services, the implementation of the Foyer model in the youth sector, the launch of an end homelessness strategy from the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH), the growth of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in the homelessness space and an important refresh by Minister McGurk and the WA Government on homelessness through the release of its path-breaking strategy *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030*.

And, so we come, a decade on, to the second Western Australian issue of *Parity*. This issue of *Parity*, like the first, is a bumper issue. It contains articles on: *All Paths Lead to a Home*; the work of the WAAEH in progressing an end homelessness agenda; the Perth Zero and 20 Lives 20 Homes Housing First projects, and other housing innovative housing projects such as the rapid access to housing Entrypoint program; ending Aboriginal homelessness through strong ACCO-led programs which also includes a Housing First component; the voice of lived experience of homelessness; responses to domestic and family violence, a major driver of homelessness in Australia; programs to end youth homelessness in Western Australia; and services designed to prevent homelessness. These articles are supplemented with a series of opinion pieces by leaders in the Western Australian homelessness sector.

In December 2021, Western Australia's first Minister for Homelessness was appointed, with the Housing Minister adding Homelessness to his Housing and Lands portfolio. The elevation of homelessness to a Ministerial portfolio is a positive development signalling a focus on an integrated and co-ordinated whole-of-government housing and homelessness response.

This development builds on the WA Government's commitment to ending homelessness as outlined in Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness. This strategy provided the roadmap for government investment into new homelessness initiatives. This included two Common Ground facilities, which are models of permanent, congregate, supportive housing based on a Housing First approach, offering apartment style living and a range of onsite services, to people experiencing homelessness. There were also further investments into Housing First homelessness initiatives.

The development of *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030* was a genuine partnership between government and the community sector, with the working group overseeing the strategy's development co-chaired by the Department of Communities Director General and the CEO of a respected community service. This partnership laid the foundation for the strategy's success. The partnership is being built on to drive strategy implementation through a new Working Group, which is co-chaired by the Director General and two CEOs from the community sector. Importantly, one of the CEOs is from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO), signalling a genuine commitment to build on the strengths of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector. Moreover, lived experience will inform all aspects of the implementation phase.

The WA issue of *Parity* includes Forewords by Hon John Carey MLA Minister for Homelessness and Mike Rowe, the Director General of the WA Department of Communities, as well as a set of excellent articles by Department of Communities staff providing an overview of *All Paths Lead to a Home*, working with the ACCO Sector to end homelessness in Western Australia, and the WA Government's important Common Ground initiatives.

The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) was formed in 2016 by a group of homelessness sector CEOs together with the Centre for Social Impact at UWA concerned with refocusing attention on ending homelessness in Western Australia rather than managing and 'reducing' homelessness. In this WA edition of *Parity*, Executive Officer of the WAAEH, John Berger provides an overview of the 18-month community campaign leading to the inspiring launch of the Western Australian Strategy to End Homelessness 2018-2028 and the subsequent work of the WAAEH.

One of the key programs of WAAEH work following the launch of its Strategy was the development, by the Centre for Social Impact at UWA, of an end homelessness evaluation framework with an accompanying dashboard reporting on achievements in relation to the aspirational set of targets included in the WAAEH Strategy. In their article in this issue, Leanne Lester and Paul Flatau provide an update on progress in achieving the WAAEH targets as well as detailing the outcome from an investigation of the WA Advance to Zero data derived from 2,623 surveys of Western Australians experiencing homelessness conducted between 2012 and 2021. The Lester and Flatau review of the evidence indicates that WA is presently not achieving the WAAEH targets and that there is a lot more work to do if the strict 2028 targets are to be achieved. Their article also reveals the high level of health and social needs among rough sleepers in Western Australia on the basis of the Advance to Zero data. Not only do we need to provide a pathway to permanent housing for those experiencing homelessness, but for many, a long-term supportive housing model either in congregate housing models such as the Common Ground model or in scattered site housing.

The Western Australian Government and the WAAEH both recognise the importance of addressing Aboriginal Homelessness within their Homelessness Strategies. As Lara Silbert from Noongar Mia Mia highlights in her article, approximately 42 per cent of people experiencing homelessness are Aboriginal people making them the highest proportion of any population group within the homelessness system. This is not a recent phenomenon, and yet a targeted response is now only emerging with the priority being announced within the WA Government Strategy.

The issue of housing and homelessness within the Aboriginal community has been subject to much discussion over the past decades. However, since formation of the Telethon Kids Institute Aboriginal Reference Group, the Metropolitan Aboriginal Housing Forum in 2018, Homelessness Week 2019 focussing on Aboriginal Homelessness has generated significant shifts and impetus towards addressing homelessness among First Nation People — especially those that present on the street. The engagement of Elders has been key in helping steer and engage the Aboriginal community to developing cultural solutions including the strengthening of the ACCO's. In her article, Lara Silbert highlight's some of the recent examples of services being developed by a collaboration between the ACCO's as a frontline response to homelessness. The development of an ACCO Peak for Community Housing Organisations facilitated by Shelter WA; the development of a Noongar Housing First Framework supported by the WAAEH; government funding for Aboriginal led services including Housing First all serve to strengthen the capacity and capability of Aboriginal Agencies. These initiatives support the development towards self-determination and increase the sector's ACCO capacity to provide a culturally safe response towards ending homelessness by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. While much work is still required, our learnings from this work will enhance the broader sector's understanding and capability to work within a cultural framework for Aboriginal people.

The Housing First model involving rapid access to permanent housing, housing choice and long-term supportive housing (where relevant) is a cornerstone of both the Western Australian Government's and the WAAEH's homelessness strategies. In their article on the Perth Zero project, Michala McMahon and Cate Pattison detail the history of the 50 Lives 50 Homes program, which was Western Australia's first Housing First initiative, and its further transformation into the Perth Zero project and the advent of the Advance to Zero methodology to WA. As the authors note, there is commitment to achieving functional zero outcomes (inflows into homelessness being matched by outflows from homelessness), but there are challenges ahead including the availability of affordable housing and the shortage of a skilled workforce to meet the demand. One of the features of the WA-based Housing First programs is their adoption of a collaborative collective impact model. This comes through strongly in the *20 Lives 20 Homes* program in Fremantle (reviewed by Shannen Vallesi and others in this issue),

the first of what we hope will be many place-based adaptations of the Housing First collective impact approach in Western Australia. Leah Watkins's article points to the critical role community housing providers can play in the Housing First approach through provision of a supportive community housing landlord service.

The Housing First supportive housing model is a high-investment model designed primarily to address the circumstances of those experiencing chronic homelessness with high health and social needs. That model is one of a number that need to be applied if Western Australia to end homelessness. The Entrypoint model is one such additional model. As pointed out by Kate Ihanimo, Executive Manager, Centrecare, in her article, the EntryPoint program seeks to rapidly respond to those who are recent entrants to homelessness from whatever source so that they don't become entrenched in homelessness. This entails rapid entry to private rental housing as well as immediate linking to homelessness accommodation services and other services where required. In a new program linked to Entrypoint, Centrecare has received funding for short-term support for people transitioning to private rental accommodation. While the WA Government has announced significant increases in the provision of social housing, which is critical to providing an exit point for those with high needs, programs that support those experiencing homelessness in the private rental market or at risk of homelessness are also a fundamental part of an end homelessness approach. This is even more the case in the context that Kate Ihanimo describes with the current tight private rental market creating significant increases in housing stress and driving increases in transitional homelessness at present in Western Australia.

Listening to and elevating the voices of people with lived experience was a priority throughout the development of the WA Homelessness Strategy. A selection of these stories were featured in a lived experience book, 'When there's no place to call home', published by the Department of Communities. Many articles in this edition touch on the critical need for government and services to engage with people with lived experience to deliver better outcomes from policy and practice.

In his article Jonathan Shapiera, from his own lived experience, outlines the impact of homelessness on him and his son, and the significant ongoing impact of homelessness on him and his friends. Mr Shapiera has been instrumental in ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience are not only heard but respected, co-ordinating lived experience input into Federal and State inquiries. As outlined by Mr Shapiera policy and program reform, when informed by people who know what works and doesn't work through their experience, will lead to meaningful change. And the right type of support, centered on the individual and their needs, as outlined by Jaron Green can be life changing. From being at rock bottom, Mr Green shares what supported him to flourish and become a critical employee of a respected homelessness service. Deborah Ralph-Kafarela shows the transformative role of the arts in bearing witness to people's voice and experiences. The Street-to-Street Project shows how pragmatic art practice and social activism in art can tell a story in a way which empowers social change. Street to Street highlights the role of the artist can play when working within community, moving away from being a visual commentator to a facilitator, engaging people with lived experience to become the artists who is telling their story. The artworks produced through this project are stunning.

Shelter WA outlines the journey that they travelled to develop resources to support housing and homelessness services to better engage with people with lived experience. The co-design process that they undertook with people with lived experience highlights the importance of organisational readiness as a foundation to drive genuine engagement. Links to the resources that were produced through the co-design process are provided in the article. The resources outline the benefits both to organisations, and to people with lived experience of genuine engagement, case studies of where this has been done well, and resources to support the engagement process.

The impact of family and domestic violence (FDV) on homelessness on women and children is well known and documented in the homelessness literature. In her article, Christine Cooke from Zonta House notes that 41 per cent of all presentations to Specialist Homelessness Services are made up of victims to FDV including a significant proportion who are children. The article points to the need to offer a range of responses to the experiences of women and children and the importance of offering prevention responses, direct interventions and post crisis support and cites a range of examples of how this is being delivered within the FDV sector. She emphasises the need to deliver the range of interventions and integrative support services to achieve long-term housing stability and outcomes. Jo Sadler and Noleen Mongoo highlight the added complication of remoteness on seeking and gaining assistance and support. These examples highlight the reform work that is occurring across the WA FDV sector.

Maddie McLeod and Amy Green from the Valuing Children Initiative highlight the importance of recognising and responding to the needs of children as part of the broader homelessness response to families. 'Listening to children' is critical in forming a more holistic response to both the adults and the needs of children. They highlight the impact childhood homelessness can have on adult experiences of homelessness and the need to address this head on while they are still children. Their research supports the development of separate service responses to children who are experiencing homelessness and the need for these responses to be informed by listening to the voice of children. They contend that ignoring the separate needs of children as part of the homelessness response fails to address the impact of homelessness may have in later life.

Finally, Dr Gloria Sutherland in her article examining Older Women's Homelessness, highlights the impact of health needs of older women who often been subject to long-term family trauma including domestic violence. She points to the complex but interrelated social and economic factors that contribute to their state of homelessness and the positive impact

that access to safe and secure housing has on women's health and well-being. Her study highlights the range of key themes that had emerged which should inform any service response to this cohort. She highlights the need for a collaborative and integrated systems response between the health system and housing and homelessness system.

The experience of youth homelessness is different to those of the adult population and manifests itself in different ways. Jo Sadler and Robyn Fernihough from Mission Australia, along with Stefaan Bruce-Truglio of YACWA and Chrissie Smith from Vinnies WA argue in this WA issue of *Parity* for a targeted youth-specific response towards ending youth homelessness. Currently, they highlight that young people have been 'left behind' with much of the current focus on street homelessness by the sector and government.

In their article they highlight how the experiences of young people have demonstrated the emergence of a cohort of young people who are excluded from the current homelessness service system and the need for reform and emergence of new models to respond to this. This cohort is significant in number and continue to remain in long-term homelessness. In the article by Stefaan and Chrissie, the authors highlight the reasons for this and outline some of the new emerging solutions that warrant consideration going forward. Much of their contention is the need to continually engage and elicit the experiences of young people to help steer those solutions that will effectively address youth homelessness. While they point to other examples globally, they contend that WA will need to develop its own 'home grown' solution along with a commitment from the sector and WA Government. Sadler and Fernihough provide examples of the different approaches being used in WA.

The focus on upstream solutions to prevent homelessness is highlighted from two perspectives. The personal cost and cost to the taxpayers of discharging people from hospital back into homelessness is well known. In the article Reducing Hospital Discharges Back into Homelessness, strategies developed by the Royal Perth Hospital Homelessness Team to prevent this are highlighted. This includes early collaborative discharge planning and enhance care co-ordination for patients. The significance of brokerage funding as a practical solution to enable people have suitable accommodation on discharge is identified as a response to the acute housing shortage. However rapid access to long-term housing coupled with individually tailored wrap around support is what is required. This article shows the important role of data and an ongoing evaluation framework to inform decision making to drive social and economic policy reform.

The article Library Connect: Early Intervention to Prevent Homelessness, illustrates an innovative intervention by St Patrick's Community Support Centre in partnership with the City of Fremantle library to respond to and prevent an increased risk of homelessness as an outcome of COVID-19. The embedding of a qualified, experienced community support worker within the library, which is seen as a safe, neutral and familiar space, increased accessibility to service support whilst reducing anxiety and stigma amongst people, many of whom required support for the first time. An evaluation of the project demonstrates how this form of early intervention prevented homelessness and addressed hardship and provides a model that could be considered by other local governments in partnership with community service providers.

While the homelessness reform process gains momentum 'shifting' towards a Housing First approach involving rapid access to permanent housing, housing choice and long-term supportive housing — there remains an ongoing concern about the demand and supply of social and affordable housing within WA. 'Housing' pervades all discussions and views across the sector as the key piece to an effective homelessness response. This is expressed across a range of views from optimism to a sense of great challenge that we face at present. Dr Johanna Mitchell gives a detailed examination of the scale and challenges around the supply of social and affordable housing over the past few years, its impact on individuals and families and on the housing and homelessness sector. Casting forward the projected strategies and investments across government to date will not keep pace with the expected demand for social and affordable housing and therefore the need to continually promote a range of options including the participation of the community housing sector and private industry. The need for long-term sustainable policies and funding is ever critical to ensuring the ongoing supply of housing for all in our community.

Evan Nunn from Accordwest provides a great example of how a local community can come together to respond to the housing crisis within the Bunbury Community. This article reminds us of how a community of diverse stakeholders came together to innovate and work together. It serves as a reminder that homelessness and housing is a 'whole of community' issue and the need to promote engagement at all levels within a community to be mobilised and create local solutions. This highlights the strength and value of placed based initiatives.

In their reflections (opinion pieces), a number of key leaders and CEOs share their thoughts on the work of the sector and give their insights into some of the ways forward.

In his opinion piece, Anglicare WA CEO Mark Glasson highlights the scale of the problem of the lack of social and affordable housing across the WA community and its impact across all levels of the community and those experiencing some form of homelessness. It also highlights that the manifestation of issue can take many forms and points towards a range of new responses as result.

Leanne Strommen from Centrecare reflects on the work of the sector and re-inforces the point of the value of learning from our work to date to continually inform the work ahead. She also highlights the significance of the value of coming together as a sector and seeking solutions collaboratively and reminding us of our humanity!

As mentioned, the challenge of housing remains, and we are reminded by Debra Zanella's reflection of the work of their Community Worker at their Day Centre. It highlights the

reality of the demands they see on a daily basis compounded by the fact that there seem to be few housing options to give staff and people a sense of resolution and optimism for their future. This is compounded by the lack of urgency and systems that seem to be in place as a response and further supports the need for ongoing advocacy for suitable housing.

Despite these challenges we are reminded by a few 'rays of hope' and sense of optimism that the sector is embracing new and innovative ways of responding. Michael Piu speaks of some of the new service responses that have emerged that are targeting some of the most vulnerable people in our community including those of Aboriginal descent. Again, he highlights that value of working together as a sector to bring about effective change.

Finally, Evan Nunn throws out a challenge to consider using technology as part of the solution to the housing supply issue. As we know of the shortage of labour compounds the capacity to deliver social and affordable housing at scale and points towards the use of 3D printing being used in other jurisdictions to rapidly develop housing.

Nevertheless, the scale of the challenge for ending homelessness remains large while we continue to experience a significant shortfall in social and affordable housing. Our responses and efforts to address these issues requires us to continually remain focussed on learning from these responses and remaining 'fixed' on the impact towards achieving our goals. We must continually strive towards scaling our efforts on those solutions that deliver the impact we are seeking.

This 2021 West Australian edition of *Parity*, like the December 2012 edition, demonstrates a period of innovation in policy and service delivery. The launch of an end homelessness strategy from the Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness galvanised change and signalled hope, shifting the rhetoric from responding to, to ending homelessness. *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030* provides a roadmap for reform. COVID-19 showed a housing and homeless services system under enormous pressure. It also showed how government, community and the services sector, with the right policy and investment settings, can innovate and adapt in response to changing needs, not only providing critical support to people in crisis, but preventing homelessness.

The vision of *All Paths Lead to a Home* is that *'Everyone has a safe place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.'* Homelessness is a complex issue, but we know what we need to do to end homelessness in Western Australia. The evidence is compelling. As this edition shows, if we are to drive complex change, we need to co-ordinate and target our efforts, based on good data and evidence-based policy, evaluating our work to inform positive change. If we are to end homelessness this must be coupled with sustained investment into services and affordable social and housing supply. With this collaborative approach we can ensure that all people in Western Australia have the housing that enables them to thrive.

The spirit of life flows by Jade Dolman. Jade is a Whadjuk/Balladong Nyoongar (Mother's side), Eastern Arrernte (Father's side) woman from Perth. — see page 6.

Working Together to End Homelessness: An Overview of *All Paths Lead to a Home*

Department of Communities

All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness (the Strategy) is a whole-of-community plan, setting the direction for all levels of government, business and the community sector in responding to and preventing homelessness in Western Australia.

The Strategy provides an overarching strategic framework that guides investment, identifies new ways of working, introduces innovation and seeks to improve service systems so that they can better respond to the needs of individuals.

The Strategy complements and supports other important pieces of work across government and the community sector, such as the *Western Australian Housing Strategy 2020–2030*, *Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness: 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Western Australia 2018–28*, and Sustainable Health Review.

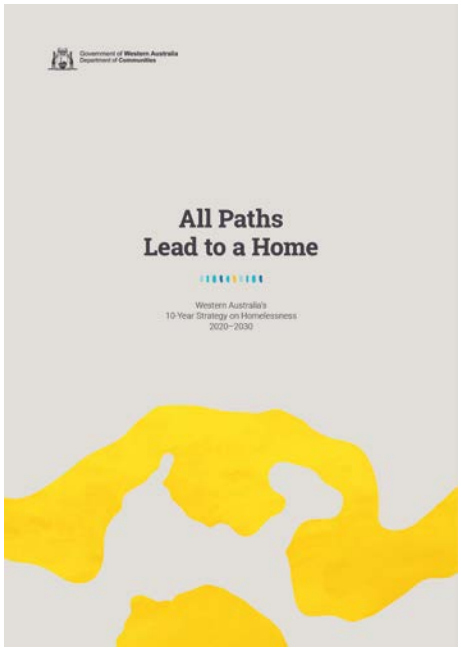
Development of the Strategy

In July 2018, the Department of Communities (Communities) commenced the development of the Strategy in partnership with the community services sector, peak bodies, Aboriginal organisations, and state government agencies. Development of the Strategy was overseen by the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group, with members drawn from across these organisations and co-chaired by the Director General, Communities, and Chief Executive Officer, Ruah Community Services.

Development of the Strategy was also informed by extensive consultation. Fifteen public consultation sessions were held throughout metropolitan and regional Western Australia. Over 300 people participated in the sessions, representing a diverse range of stakeholders. Information was also gathered via an online survey, with 276 responses received from state government agencies, local government, people working in service delivery, interested members of the community and those with lived experience of homelessness.

These processes resulted in the development of a Directions Paper, which outlined proposed reform directions and sought feedback. The Directions Paper was released in March 2019, with over 50 submissions received during the six weeks it was open for public comment.

Hearing and elevating the voices of people with lived experience was also a priority throughout development of the Strategy. Over 60 conversations and interviews were held with individuals about their personal experiences. A selection of these stories were featured in a lived experience book, *When there's no place to call home*, published by Communities.[1]



Communities also commissioned the University of Western Australia Centre for Social Impact to develop *Homelessness in Western Australia: A review of the research and statistical evidence report*.[2] This report provided an overview of expert research covering health, housing, justice and other relevant data to inform development of the Strategy.

The collective knowledge and shared understanding developed through these research and consultation processes provided an important foundation upon which to build the strategy and guide its implementation.

Key Elements of the Strategy

The Strategy represents a significant shift in homelessness policy in Western Australia, moving from the goal of managing homelessness to ending it.[3] It prioritises evidence-based models of housing and support, including a shift towards housing first and low barrier approaches, as well as improving the homelessness response system to make it more co-ordinated, place-based and person-centred.

The Strategy proposes an initial focus on reducing the most visible and acute form of homelessness — rough sleeping. During the later years of the Strategy there will be an increased focus on prevention and early intervention. The Strategy recognises the need to develop tailored approaches to vulnerable cohorts, including young people, older people, people exiting government institutions and care, people with co-occurring

mental health or alcohol and other drug issues, people living with a disability and LGBTQI+ people. Running across all elements of the Strategy is a strong and overarching commitment to reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people within the homelessness population.

Box 1
Key elements of the Strategy

Vision

Everyone has a safe place to call home and is supported to achieve stable and independent lives.

Where we will focus our efforts

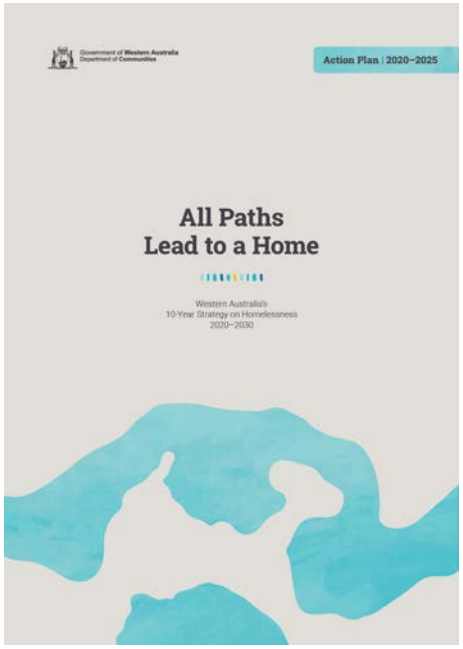
1. Improving Aboriginal wellbeing
2. Providing safe, secure and stable homes
3. Preventing homelessness
4. Strengthening and coordinating our responses and impact

What are the priorities?

- A Housing First approach
- A No Wrong Door approach
- A whole-of-community approach
- Place-based responses
- Rough sleeping

Action Plan 2020–2025

Two 5-year Action Plans drive implementation of the Strategy. These plans provide detail on how priority actions will progress, including who is responsible for delivery. The Action Plans support collaboration across government and the community services sector and help align activities across a number of initiatives to collectively contribute to the achievement of outcomes under the Strategy.



The first Action Plan, which covers the period from 2020 to 2025, was released in July 2020 and built on the consultation undertaken to develop the Strategy. It contains over 70 actions which focus on ending rough sleeping, building a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery and increasing low-barrier responses.

Development of the first Action Plan was informed by the unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID19 pandemic, which reached Western Australia in early 2020. The Action Plan incorporates lessons learned during the early responses to the pandemic and provides flexibility to respond to new challenges as we move towards a 'new normal'.

Strategy Implementation

The Supporting Communities Forum will be responsible for guiding implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure that responsibility is shared across government and the community sector. While the COVID-19 pandemic caused the Supporting Communities Forum to temporarily pause its activities in 2020 and then pivot towards a focus on pandemic recovery, in September 2021 the Forum resolved to create a dedicated Homelessness Working Group to progress implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan and provide validation and oversight.

The Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group has been established and the Strategy is already transforming the way that Government and the community sector work to support vulnerable people.

The McGowan Government has committed over $100 million in new investment to support implementation of the Strategy. Several key homelessness initiatives are outlined in Box 2. Within the community sector, services providers and peak bodies have been leading the delivery of critical work including improved co-ordination accommodation and support for rough sleepers, the gathering of more robust data and information through the By Name List, and the delivery of housing first training.

Box 2
Key State Government homelessness initiatives

Communities is progressing several key initiatives that support implementation of the Strategy:

- Development of *Common Ground* facilities in East Perth and Mandurah.[3] These facilities will be purpose-built, multistorey residential complexes with on-site support services, where those with high needs receive personalised case-management to help them rebuild their lives and reconnect with the community.
- Delivery of services under the *Housing First Homelessness Initiative* in Perth, Geraldton, Bunbury and Rockingham/ Mandurah.[5] The initiative will provide accommodation and wrap around support to people sleeping rough.
- Opening of *Boorloo Bidee Mia* in August 2021, a low barrier culturally supported accommodation service in the Perth central business district offering medium-term accommodation.[6]
- Opening the first grant round for the *Local Government Partnership Fund for Homelessness*. The Fund will support local governments and partner organisations to address homelessness in their local community.
- Working with the sector on development of the *Online Homelessness Services Portal*.[7] The portal will make it easier for people who are experiencing homelessness to access help and support.

Communities has undertaken co-design processes and engaged with government and community

sector partners during implementation of specific initiatives and has engaged with stakeholders to strengthen partnerships, improve understanding, and develop better ways of working more broadly. The recent Youth Homelessness Roundtable, convened by Communities and the Youth Affairs Council of WA is a recent example of such efforts (see Box 3).

Work to improve alignment of the current homelessness service system to the Strategy has also progressed, beginning with completion of the *'Homeless Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map'*[8] (Roadmap) in January 2021. The study was undertaken in consultation with the homelessness sector and made recommendations for system change to improve alignment with the Strategy and better meet the needs of clients. The report is informing Communities' efforts to develop a new Commissioning Plan to support a cohesive and consistent approach to procurement and contracting for key service delivery areas, including homelessness.[9]

In line with the recommendations contained in the Roadmap, Communities is undertaking a trial of a place-based, person-centred commissioning approach in the South West region over two years, commencing on 1 July 2022. The trial will seek to engage current service providers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, and state and local government agencies to develop a coordinated homelessness response that better responds to local needs and issues. Communities has already held two design labs with stakeholders in the South West to begin to design the new model.

Box 3
Youth Homelessness Roundtable

Helping children and young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness is a priority under *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030*.

On 12 November 2021 Mike Rowe, Director General, Communities, and Sandy McKiernan, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA), co-chaired a Youth Homelessness Roundtable.

The roundtable provided Communities with an opportunity for a deeper discussion with the youth homelessness sector, to build relationships and identify ways to work together to better support young Western Australians who find themselves without a home on any given night.

The event was attended by approximately 40 representatives from youth homelessness services, peak bodies, and Communities.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Communities will continue to focus on implementing the significant new initiatives announced by the McGowan Government to support the Strategy, and will work with other government agencies, private business and the community services sector to continuously improve efforts to address homelessness in Western Australia.

The establishment of the Supporting Communities Forum Homelessness Working Group will bring a renewed energy and drive to implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan in 2022. Led by the Working Group, the State Government and the community sector will look for ways to keep improving, adapting and refining our responses to ensure that the Strategy remains a living and relevant document.

Sandy McKiernan, Acting Chief Executive Officer YACWA speaking at the Youth Homelessness Roundtable

Endnotes

1. Department of Communities 2019, *'When there's no place to call home, Stories of people who have experienced homelessness in WA.'* Available from: *https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/all-paths-lead-home-western-australias-10-year-strategy-homelessness-2020-2030*
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4. Further information from the Common Ground page on the WA.gov.au website: *https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/common-ground.*
5. Further information from the 'Housing First Homelessness Initiative' page on the WA.gov.au website: *https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/housing-first-homelessness-initiative.*
6. Further information from the 'Boorloo Bidee Mia' page on the WA.gov.au website: *https://www.wa.gov.au/service/community-services/accommodation-services/boorloo-bidee-mia.*
7. Further information from the 'Online Homelessness Services Portal' page on the WA.gov.au website: *https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/online-homelessness-services-portal.*
8. Collective iQ, January 2021, 'Homeless Service System Alignment Analysis and Road Map'. Available from: *https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/homeless-service-system-alignment-analysis-and-road-map*
9. 'Department of Communities Commissioning Plan' page on the WA.gov.au website: *https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/department-of-communities-commissioning-plan*

Working with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Sector to End Homelessness in Western Australia

Department of Communities

In Western Australia, the Department of Communities' (Communities) mandate is to deliver community services in the areas of disability, child protection and family support, and housing, including responding to homelessness across the State.

While making up only 3.1 per cent of the total Western Australian population, Aboriginal people are significantly over-represented in Western Australia's homelessness population.[1] Experienced differently across the regions, homelessness is often a result of intergenerational trauma and disadvantage.[2]

Communities understands that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide more culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal people, which leads to improved outcomes, and in September 2019 established an ACCO Project Working Group to develop a 10-Year ACCO Strategy.

The ACCO Strategy aims to improve the process to procure and deliver services to Aboriginal children, families and communities and support ACCOs to increase their capacity to deliver services across Western Australia on behalf of Communities.

The ACCO Project Working Group comprises nine ACCO representatives from across Western Australia, Communities staff and representation from the Department of Finance (Finance) when required. The group has been instrumental in the development of the ACCO Strategy and its first Implementation Plan.

Developed through a co-design process between ACCO representatives and Communities over the past two years, it is anticipated that the ACCO Strategy will be launched in early 2022. Focusing on outcomes, the partnership allowed for open discussion on the issues Aboriginal people face and the ways in which Communities can work differently with service providers to address them.

The ACCO Strategy will improve the way in which Communities commissions the services of ACCOs, focusing on culturally informed, culturally led and co-designed services, where Aboriginal children and families are the primary recipients of the services delivered.

The ACCO Strategy will focus on three strategic priority areas:

1. Cultural Safety and Governance
2. Partnerships
3. Opportunities.

In the context of housing, while we know that the number of public housing properties has remained unchanged since 2011, in some states Aboriginal Community Housing property numbers have

Steve Bevington CEO Aboriginal Community Housing and Maureen O'Meara Chairperson Aboriginal Community Housing at the RAP in Kunannara

more than doubled over a decade.[3] Through the ACCO Strategy, Communities will provide an environment that supports ACCOs to increase their community housing stock and services, therefore providing community led, culturally safe and culturally appropriate housing options for Aboriginal people.

Communities continues to look at innovative ways to support the ACCO sector to deliver services to Aboriginal people and, as a direct outcome of the work of the Project Working Group on the ACCO Strategy, an ACCO Capability Building Grants Program was established in partnership with Finance. The grants program totalled $850,000.

In announcing the grants program, Community Services Minister Simone McGurk said the ACCO Capability Grants Program enabled ACCOs to chart their own course as businesses.

'These grants will help to ensure the State Government is providing the most effective and appropriate support possible to organisations across this diverse and important sector,' the Minister said.[4]

Nineteen grants of up to $50,000 each were provided to assist ACCOs in building capability. This is in areas of operational and cultural governance and organisational and workforce development for the delivery of more culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal children, families and communities. The grants program has a direct impact on future opportunities for these ACCOs to strengthen their organisations and further establish themselves as the best service providers for their people. Of the 19 ACCOs receiving grants, 10 of these provide housing and homelessness support services.

Communities' commitment to empower and promote a strong and driven ACCO sector through the grants program will also help to meet our obligations under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the Agreement). Priority Reform Area Two of the Agreement, Building the community-controlled sector, aims to increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.[5]

While development of the ACCO Strategy began before the Agreement, strongly aligning the ACCO Strategy and Implementation Plan with the Agreement will help to deliver culturally secure outcomes for Aboriginal people.

So, what's next for the ACCO Strategy? The flexible and phased approach to future ACCO Strategy Implementation Plans ensures that the Strategy remains responsive to new priorities and challenges faced as the ACCO sector is strengthened. Working in a continuous cycle of codesign, development, implementation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation, this flexibility will move Communities toward supporting ACCOs to be the strong and driven sector needed to deliver culturally secure outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Endnotes

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Common Ground: A Proven Model to Support Vulnerable People Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Pressures

Department of Communities

Responding to the complex issue of homelessness, along with the increasing demand for social housing, are key challenges requiring a whole of Government and community response.

Significant effort and resources are being dedicated to address homelessness in Western Australia, with collaboration between the three levels of Government (Commonwealth, State and Local), along with community housing organisations and service providers.

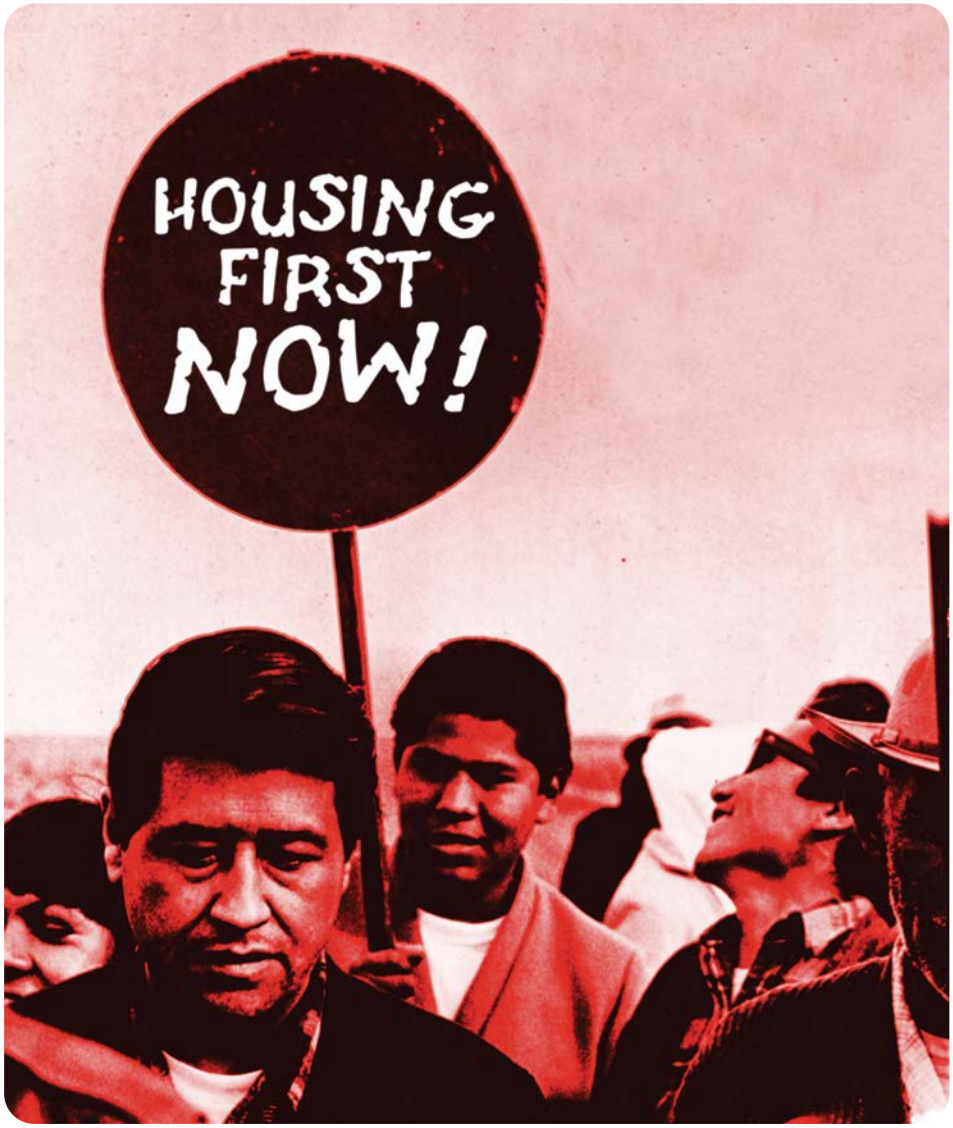
The importance of an integrated, Housing First approach is recognised. This is demonstrated in the State Government's first-class strategy, *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030* (the Strategy). The Strategy provides the road map to end homelessness in the state.

The Department of Communities (Communities) in collaboration with the Supporting Communities Forum is leading the initiatives under the Strategy. One of the key actions in delivering homelessness outcomes is the development of two Common Ground facilities in Western Australia. Common Ground is a model of permanent, supportive housing and is based on a Housing First approach. It offers apartment style living and a range of onsite services, providing people with a safe place to call home. The model housing is a social mix of people who have experienced homelessness and people who are on a low income.

A purpose-built Common Ground facility will be developed on the corner of Hill and Wellington Streets, East Perth. It will comprise of 112 self-contained apartments along with on-site support services, 24/7 concierge, indoor and outdoor communal areas and commercial space. The City of Perth was selected as a location for the first Common Ground facility as it has the highest number of people sleeping rough in the state.

The second Common Ground facility will be located in Mandurah. It will provide up to 50 self-contained apartments. The City of Mandurah has an estimated 50 to 80 people sleeping rough at any point in time within a 5km radius of the Mandurah's central business district.[1] Mandurah also has a relatively low presence of social housing at 3 per cent, compared to the state-wide market presence of 3.7 per cent.

Evidence from Common Ground facilities across Australia shows the importance of locating these facilities near public transport, local amenities and a range of public services such as primary health services. These factors



have been integral in selecting the two Western Australian sites.

Common Ground — An International Perspective

Originating in New York City more than 20 years ago, Common Ground's impressive best practice outcomes include:

- Nearly 4,000 units of housing in New York City, Connecticut, and upstate New York.
- More than 4,300 people sleeping under a Common Ground (now referred to Breaking Ground in the United States) roof each night.
- At least 500 individuals in transitional or permanent housing each year.[2]
- A network of well-designed, affordable apartments, linked to the services people need to maintain their housing, restore their health, and regain their economic independence.
- More than 5,000 individuals have been enabled to overcome homelessness.[3]
- Over 90 per cent of people who have been placed into permanent housing through Breaking Ground's 'Street to Home' (S2H) program have remained in housing.
- The S2H program reduced street homelessness by 87 per cent in the 20-block Times Square neighbourhood, and by 43 per cent in the surrounding 230 blocks of West Midtown.
- There are upwards of 750 new apartments in the development pipeline.

Today, Breaking Ground in the United States of America estimates over 8,000 vulnerable people are housed through programs such as the Street Outreach, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Supportive and Affordable Housing across New York.[4] The underlying approach has provided the foundations for similar programs in other countries and the model of 'Housing First' is being adopted internationally.

Common Ground – Australian Evidence

The Common Ground model has been successfully adopted in other Australian cities including Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide. These examples have proven highly effective in improving outcomes for people who have experienced chronic homelessness and people on a low income.

In an independent evaluation of Brisbane Common Ground, tenants were found to experience less mental health episodes, reduced visits to the emergency department and lower interactions with the police. Critically, the evaluation of the Brisbane Common Ground found residents who identified as tenants, as opposed to being homeless, could start to access services that would help increase their autonomy. The evaluation also measured cost effectiveness of the model, finding savings to Government expenditure more than $13,000 per tenant per year.[5]

An evaluation of the Camperdown Common Ground facility in 2016, found lower symptoms of psychological distress, a drop over time in the proportion of participants use of alcohol and other drugs, and a 63 per cent retention rate among formerly homeless tenants over 28 months.[6]

In Western Australia, a total of $73.5 million has been committed by the Australian and Western Australian Governments to the Common Ground facilities. Of the $73.5 million, the Australian Government has contributed $8 million for the East Perth Common Ground as part of the Perth City Deal.

Both the East Perth and Mandurah Common Ground facilities are an integral part of the Western Australian Government's significant investment into housing first homelessness initiatives.

Endnotes

1. On 17 March and 27 October 2020 rough sleeper counts were conducted by the City of Mandurah and volunteers in partnership with the City of Perth (*Mandurah Homelessness and Street Presence Strategy 2021–2023 A place for everyone*).
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The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

John Berger, Executive Officer, Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) is comprised of a group of individuals and organisations that have come together to end homelessness in Western Australia (WA).

In its formative phase, the group of CEOs and leaders all acknowledged that 'enough was enough' — we needed to stop responding to homelessness by shifting our focus towards ending it!

They acknowledged that they had been part of a system that has seen homelessness continue to grow both in numbers and level of entrenchment. The individual or agency efforts had not stemmed the tide. They came to recognise that homelessness is a whole of community issue and its ending would be reliant on their capacity to engage and support a whole of community response.

In 2016 the WAAEH members came together to focus on the vision of ending homelessness. In doing so the sector sought to shift the focus and set a new agenda towards ending homelessness by influencing the broader community and the government. This was propelled by the opportunity to cast their minds forward to envisage a community where homelessness did not exist. They set about articulating what a community without homelessness looked like, and then set about describing what the system needed to look like if they had succeeded in ending homelessness. This gave the insight to develop the framework that would guide not only WAAEH members, but the whole of community towards the efforts that would end homelessness in WA.

The individuals who formed the original WAAEH were asked to personally commit to ending homelessness. They signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to that effect. This group was made up of:

John Berger (former CEO of St Bart's); Prof Paul Flatau (Director of Centre for Social Impact — University of Western Australia (UWA)); Mark Glasson (Director Services Anglicare, now CEO); Kathleen Gregory (Former CEO of Foundation Housing); Amanda Hunt (CEO of Uniting WA); Adele Stewart (former Acting CEO of St Vincent de Paul); Katie Stubley (Strategic Design Manager Centre for Social Impact — UWA); and Debra Zanella (CEO of Ruah Community Services).

The primary focus of the Alliance membership was to work towards ending homelessness — when they met they agreed to park agency hats/egos at the door. They shared the belief and understanding that homelessness could not be ended by any single agency or program, but rather through their collaboration and commitment to a system that would seek and drive change. Their role as a CEO was secondary to the goal of ending homelessness.

On this basis, they began to examine the evidence across the globe to learn how other communities were ending homelessness. This resulted in an 18-month community campaign to develop the Western Australian Strategy to End Homelessness 2018–2028 that brought together contributions of many people from homelessness services, those experiencing homelessness, funders of services and members of the community. The Strategy was authored by the original Alliance members with the inclusion of Susan Rooney (CEO of St Vincent de Paul) and Daniel Morrison (CEO of Wungening Aboriginal Corp). This group became known as the Facilitating Group that guided the early work of the WAAEH.

This 10-year Strategy sought to provide a framework to inform the process of ending homelessness and provide sign posts for action. It was designed to be utilised to create further plans in specific communities, groups or regions. The plan acted as a blueprint that could be adopted by any community seeking to end homelessness.

The Strategy included five key focus areas:

1. *Housing: Ensure adequate and affordable housing.* This means having a supply of housing that meets the needs of those who need it. It also means having multiple pathways into permanent housing and multiple housing options including housing with support services that are all effective.

2. *Prevention: A focus on prevention and early intervention.* Developing system, service and social responses that ensure people at risk of homelessness have the supports they need to prevent them becoming homeless. This will involve an improving recognition of the health value of a home.

3. *A strong and coordinated response.* A 24/7 'no wrong door' system that delivers responsive action across different community and health support systems that is well coordinated and acts quickly.

4. *Data, research and targets Improve data.* The establishment of the evidence base on what works, systems knowledge, and the accountability of the health and social support system to achieve the goals of the Strategy including building the evidence base around the health value of a home. Setting clear targets that ensure service delivery.

5. *Building community capacity:* Solutions developed that are sourced from those who have experienced homelessness. All sectors that support those experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage need to be involved to deepen their capacity to end homelessness in WA. Developing a broad public movement, inclusive of all members of the community who have the desire to end homelessness, a movement that brings more people and resources will ensure success.

Since the publication of the Strategy, the WAAEH has been working towards its implementation, acting to support people and communities who share the common vision of ending homelessness, including the Western Australian Government in their development of a 10 Year strategy — *All Paths Lead to a Home*.

The WAAEH had been led by a Facilitating Group. The WAAEH comprises the Facilitating Group and Alliance Partners and individual members who together with other key stakeholders, meet regularly to discuss progress in the implementation of the Strategy, learn from each other and develop initiatives, and work with the broader ecosystem to end homelessness.

The WAAEH sought to change the governance and membership of the facilitating group in early 2020 to reflect the new phase of the work of the Alliance based on the successful elements that had driven its achievements up to that point. The WAAEH Facilitating Committee was renamed as the WAAEH Collaborative Lead Group and broadened its membership beyond the initial group with new individuals coming on board from its Strategic Partners. A smaller Steering Group was formed made up people drawn from the Collaborative Lead Group to guide the work of the WAAEH on an operational level.

At present the Steering Group is made up of:
John Berger (Executive Officer — WAAEH — Observer);
Philippa Boldy (Director Services — Anglicare WA);
Paul Flatau (Director of Centre for Social Impact — UWA);
Amanda Hunt (Chief Executive Officer — Uniting WA);
Michelle Mackenzie (Chief Executive Officer — Shelter WA — Observer);
Michael Piu (Chief Executive Officer — St Patricks Community Support Centre);
Mark Slattery (Executive Manager — Ruah Community Services);
Leanne Strommen (General Manager — Centrecare Inc).

The WAAEH also continued to seek to extend its membership base more generally so as to broaden the social movement to end homelessness in Western Australia. We now have over 700 subscribers to the WAAEH. This has been key to our ongoing success in engaging with the broader community.

The WAAEH has succeeded in creating the 'thought leadership' required to stimulate and influence change across the system and community. The Alliance has functioned as a 'disruptor' or agent of change, to ensure that existing systems do not remain the same, but rather change towards systems that will end homelessness. This is why evidence is fundamental to informing decisions to reshape the system. The key to this change is the capacity to innovate, test and trial new ways of doing that is consistent with the key strategies of the 10-year plan.

The WAAEH could be described as a cross sector network that enshrines a collective vision of ending homelessness in WA by 2028 and provides the public interface for addressing homelessness in WA. The Alliance seeks to leverage knowledge, networks and resources from across all sectors and parts of our community, including business and philanthropic sectors. The Alliance thinks and acts at a systems level with a long-term horizon, beyond conventional boundaries and cycles.

In many ways, the WAAEH could be described as holding the 'system memory' by ensuring that as we learn, we continue to shape the system towards our objectives and remind stakeholders of the reason why we have come together. We also play a key role in 'sense-making', that is, in providing understanding where each of the components of the system belongs

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and how to make it fit for purpose. This requires us to monitor progress against our goals and celebrate our successes, but also to hold ourselves to account for any inaction or lack of progress. We have described ourselves as the central space for learning and innovation to effect change in WA to end homelessness.

We do our work across four broad ranging activities:

1. Convening and Connecting
2. Catalysing Change
3. Accelerating Learning and Development
4. Tracking Change.

Convening and Connecting

We provide a Community Hub that is a central, safe (virtual) place for organisations, communities and individuals to converse, share, build relationships (formal and informal), collaborate, and discover together. We communicate key messages, information and the narrative required to reach our vision. We mobilise resources (capital, goods, time and talent) from many different parts of the community, including philanthropic and business sectors.

This involves communication across and range of mediums, hosting regular meetings, initiating and supporting working groups around cohorts or topics, participating in relevant forums, talks and seminars and major events.

Catalysing Change

We provide the space to create Solution Labs where we support, coach, and facilitate others to discover and design appropriate solutions that support our vision.

We help to scale effective solutions (for example, from metro to regional areas; or from prototype to system-wide). We prioritise in alignment with the 10-Year Strategy and new insights/evidence.

This involves supporting and facilitating Action Plans as they relate to a particular region or cohort. We provide capacity building, education and toolkits for priority actions including: co-design kits, Housing First and Advance to Zero.

Accelerating Learning and Development

We function as a Think Tank/ Clearinghouse of information — we find, translate and distribute up-to-date, relevant research and case studies demonstrating 'best practice' as it relates to ending homelessness.

This involves providing speakers at events and conferences, creating fact sheets and website content, providing input to planning and service developments and providing resourcing information.

Progress Tracker

We track our progress by measuring the state of homelessness in WA to understand how we are collectively tracking. We also measure the effectiveness of the Alliance's work to learn and improve our work based on results. We seek to ensure that we can all achieve progress through learning and understanding changes in the system.

This involves reporting annually through our WA State of Homelessness Report and Dashboard Report. These Reports provide a focus for our work by evaluating where we are having impact, and where we should direct our efforts.

The Alliance made a conscious decision to not create another not-for-profit organisation but instead chose to partner with Shelter WA to act as the back-bone support and vehicle through which funds can be sought and held on behalf of the Alliance.

The Alliance came together to end homelessness. We believe that taking a co-ordinated and collaborative approach across the whole community can and will end homelessness in Western Australia.

We would like to acknowledge the support of all our partners for their commitment and support for the work of the Alliance, especially Shelter WA as the sponsoring organisation. We would also like to acknowledge the significant funds provided by Lotterywest, Department for Communities, and the Sisters of St John of God, to have allowed this work to occur — Thank You!

The Western Australian Council on Homelessness

Samantha Drury, Chief Executive Officer of St Bart's
and Chair of the Western Australian Council on Homelessness

The primary role of The Western Australian Council on Homelessness (WACH) is to provide advice and commentary on emerging views within the homelessness landscape, with the aim of developing ideas and communication to the Minister for Community Services, Children's Interests and Women's Interests.

As the CEO of St Bart's and in my role as Chair of WACH, I am acutely aware of the many issues that impact vulnerable people who find themselves without a home. And, as with most challenges we face as a society, there are multiple layers that contribute to the causes of homelessness.

Both through St Bart's and WACH, our work is particularly focused on helping the most vulnerable within the cohorts of vulnerable people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The unique needs of youth experiencing homelessness, including young indigenous people and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and questioning (LGBTIQ+), are of particular importance. While our understanding of the scope and dynamics of youth homelessness continues to grow and improve, we must act now to develop

our response to it so that the homelessness these young people are experiencing today doesn't become their forever story.

The Youth Pride Network's State of Play Report highlighted that the youth within the LGBTIQ+ community are overrepresented in the homelessness sector. The report also documents the experiences of young LGBTIQ+ people within the homelessness system, including the barriers they face to entry, discrimination they experience, structural issues that make services inaccessible, and characteristics of LGBTIQ+ affirming service practice, how the sector supports this group is a focus going forward for WACH, ensuring the sector integrates LGBTIQ+ inclusion into core business practices, so that service delivery is appropriate for and affirming for young LGBTIQ+ people.

Our focus on helping the most vulnerable of the vulnerable people in our community extends to those experiencing family and domestic violence (FDV). In our work at St Bart's, we have extensive experience in supporting survivors of FDV whom have found themselves without a home having fled violence in their past. Women living in regional, rural and remote areas of the country who experience FDV, face specific issues related to their geographical location, as well as the cultural and social characteristics of living in these communities. These characteristics can be particularly exacerbated within Indigenous and CaLD communities, where familial disengagement and isolation can be the significant consequence.

FDV victims in remote areas often face the fear of losing their community support network and friends, where the perpetrator continues to reside in the small community and there is no safe place for the FDV victim to go, where there is a distinct dichotomy of the need to move away to find accommodation and/or escape the perpetrator, and the need to maintain support drawn from closeness to culture and family.

Closer to the St Bart's family, one of our focuses is on how we can expand our services to continue to provide 24/7 support to those people at risk of homelessness who have prematurely aged through their life experiences. St Bart's runs the only residential aged care home for people who need to receive 24/7 support with their diet, clinical and wellbeing needs. In a similar way to the cohorts already highlighted, we need to ensure this group of people has access to the aged care supports they need in a way that matches their needs whilst recognising that like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, the aged group that these services will need to be available to, will be younger than the general population and that these needs are recognised through the work of the Royal Commission.

In addition to WACH's focus on the most vulnerable within the homeless population, the concern of what COVID normal will have both on the people we support but also on our staff and the sectors' ability to attract and retain our workers is also at the forefront of the Council's mind. So, with all the amazing work and initiatives that have been announced, such as the SHERP grants and Common Ground announcements, there is still more to focus on to ensure we leave nobody behind.

The End Homelessness in Western Australia Campaign

On Friday 13th April 2018, close to 1,000 people were involved in bringing the streets of Perth alive, featuring Gavin Bryars' composition *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, to raise awareness on homelessness in Western Australia.

This incredible large-scale community event would not have been possible without the wonderful support of many people and organisations and the UWA Conservatorium of Music, as the WA Alliance to End Homelessness launched their #EndHomelessnessWA campaign.

Ending homelessness in WA takes a whole of community approach, one that needs the support of many individuals, organisations and communities to drive this forward. Through this event the Alliance generated a great deal of community support as well as raising awareness of what is needed to end homelessness.

Targeting an End to Homelessness in Western Australia: The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness Dashboard and End Homelessness Report

Leanne Lester and Paul Flatau, Centre for Social Impact, The University of Western Australia

Significant resources and effort are being put towards addressing homelessness in Western Australia (WA) by homelessness services, housing providers and the WA Government particularly through the *Homelessness Strategy 2020–2030* and programs flowing from it, as well as new initiatives in social housing supply, in family and domestic violence, out-of-home care and youth justice programs.

In 2018, the WA Alliance to End Homelessness (WAAEH) released a 10-year strategy to end homelessness by 2028 through a community-based response, developed by a group of organisations that came together with the goal of ending homelessness in WA.[1] The nine Strategy targets of the WAAEH are focussed on responding to existing homelessness and preventing homelessness by 2028. Each year the WAAEH assesses the extent to which Western Australia is achieving the WAAEH targets and reports on efforts to end homelessness in its Dashboard and Ending Homelessness in WA reports.[2,3]

The first target of the WAAEH is that WA will by 2028 have ended all forms of chronic homelessness including chronic rough sleeping. The second target states that no individual or family in WA will sleep rough or stay in supported accommodation for longer than five nights before moving into an affordable, safe, decent, permanent home with the support required to sustain it. Target 3 states that the WA rate of homelessness will have been halved from its 2016 level while Target 4 states that the underlying causes that result in people becoming homeless have been met head-on, resulting in a reduction by more than half in the inflow of people and families into homelessness in any one year.

There are three main sources of data that can be used to provide a view and profile of homelessness in WA: The Census of Population and Housing; Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) data; and the Advance to Zero national database. These data sources can be used to determine whether the WAEEH strategy targets are being met.

The State of Homelessness in Western Australia

Overall, progress towards ending homelessness in WA is mixed: while the overall rate of homelessness according to the Census decreased between 2001 and 2016, the proportion of people experiencing the most acute form of homelessness, rough sleeping, increased. The rate and number of people accessing SHSs has also increased, as has the proportion of people ending support periods without their needs met.

There is no sign that the target of ending homelessness in WA is currently being achieved. However, very few people who present to SHSs in housing but at risk of homelessness are homeless at the end of their support periods, suggesting that SHS are effective at helping people to retain their housing.

Western Australians who use SHS record substantially shorter support period durations (16 days versus 43 days) and fewer nights in accommodation (eight nights versus 28 nights) compared with Australian averages, perhaps reflecting a skew of the WA homelessness system towards crisis rather than temporary or permanent accommodation options.

Rates of regional and remote homelessness, according to both Census and SHS data, are substantially higher than in Perth. The Outback region recorded the highest rate of SHS access in the whole country, and a rate of homelessness almost five times that of Perth (244.1 per 10,000 people versus 51.7). Living in overcrowded dwellings was the most common form of homelessness in regional and remote WA, though rough sleepers accounted for a higher proportion of the homeless population in regional and remote areas (14.9 per cent) than in Perth (10.2 per cent).

The population of people experiencing homelessness in WA is characterised by an over-representation of Aboriginal people, people who have experienced family or domestic violence, people leaving institutional care (such as out of home care and prisons), veterans, people with mental health issues, young people, and people with substance use issues. This reflects what we know about the individual antecedents of homelessness.

The evidence is mixed in terms of the underlying drivers of homelessness in WA. There has been no reduction in poverty over time but against other states in Australia current employment outcomes are strong in Australia. After a long period of progress in terms of housing affordability, WA is currently experiencing increased rents. The WA Government has now moved to address the very large shortfall in social housing. Alcohol lifetime risk is falling but family and domestic violence is not showing signs of falling. The WA Government has implemented important reforms in out of home care and in mental health care.

Insights into Homelessness in WA from the Advance to Zero Database

The Advance to Zero database provides substantial detail and context about people experiencing homelessness. The Advance to Zero database is built on Zero homelessness projects and focuses on understanding the inflows, and the number of people actively homeless within a community and exits from homelessness. A measurement of inflow and outflow of people into homelessness enables services to improve their understanding of any potential service patterns.

The Advance to Zero data comprises surveys of people experiencing homelessness, primarily rough sleeping, using the Vulnerability Index, Vulnerability Index — Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool, and the By-Name List instruments. In WA, 2,623 surveys were conducted between 2012 and 2021 (March 31) with people experiencing homelessness, mostly living in Perth. Analysis of this data reveals people's experiences of homelessness across domains of wellbeing — physical and mental health, financial and social — and charts their journeys through homelessness. The table below outlines the key results from the Advance to Zero analysis.

The majority (53 per cent) of WA respondents in the Advance to Zero database were considered high acuity needing permanent housing with long-term support. A total of 1,117 people were housed between 2012 and 2021. Of these, 32 per cent were permanently housed and 68 per cent were temporarily accommodated. Of those with a permanent placement, 52 per cent were placed in public housing, 20 per cent in community housing, 13 per cent in private rentals, seven per cent in supportive

DOMAIN	HEADLINE FINDINGS
Demographics	WA rough sleepers surveyed were mostly male, straight and had an average age of 41.2 years, with over one-quarter having low educational attainment. Just over half were sleeping rough at the time of survey, with the vast majority of the rest being in crisis, temporary, and short-term accommodation. Individuals had, on average, spent over 4.5 years (55 months) homeless in their lives: families had spent just over three years (37 months) homeless.
Health	WA respondents had reported rates of dehydration (29 per cent); a history of heatstroke/exhaustion (27 per cent); skin and foot infections (19 per cent), epilepsy (9 per cent), asthma (32 per cent), Hepatitis C (19 per cent), heart disease, arrhythmia or irregular heartbeat (20 per cent), diabetes (13 per cent), emphysema (seven per cent), kidney disease (seven per cent), and serious brain injury or head trauma (36 per cent) significantly higher than in the general population.
Mental health	More than two-thirds of WA respondents reported that they have problems concentrating or remembering things, with more than half having spoken with a psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health professional in the last six months. Nearly half (49 per cent) had gone to an emergency department due to not feeling emotionally well or because of their nerves, with over one-third reporting that they had been taken to hospital against their will for mental health reasons. More than half reported diagnosis of depression (59 per cent) and anxiety (52 per cent), three in ten people reported diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder and had been diagnosed with psychosis.
Alcohol and other drug use	Three-quarters of respondents reported that they had experienced or been told that they had problematic drug or alcohol use or abused drugs or alcohol, with four in ten respondents reporting that they had consumed alcohol or drugs almost every day or every day during the past month, and had used injection drugs or shots in the last six months. Nearly half reported that they had been treated for drug or alcohol problems and returned to drinking or using drugs, with nearly a third reported blacking out because of alcohol or drug use in the past month.
Health service use	On average, respondents had been hospitalised 1.9 times in the six months prior to survey. Almost half had not been hospitalised at all, indicating that a small number of people accounted for a large proportion of hospitalisations. Emergency Departments were visited an average of 3.5 times per person and respondents were taken to hospital by ambulance 1.7 times in the six months prior to survey. Average per person cost of health service use by WA respondents in the six months prior to survey was $14,359, comprised of $10,458 in hospitalisation costs, $2,182 in Emergency Department costs, and $1,718 in ambulance costs.
Financial wellbeing	While most respondents had regular income, control of their finances, and a health care card, the majority also reported that they did not receive enough money to meet their expenses on a fortnightly basis, with only one in five people reporting their basic needs were met. Over one-third said that there was a person or people who believed that they owed them money.
Social wellbeing	Approximately half of the respondents reported that they have friends of family that take their money, borrow cigarettes, use their drugs, drink their alcohol or get them to do things they don't want to do, and that they have people in their life whose company they do not enjoy but are around out of convenience or necessity. Over one-third planned activities for happiness; one in ten reported that they have a pet.

housing, and eight per cent in a group home, aged care, and 'other' permanent housing. As one would expect, those who were chronically homeless were more likely to return to homelessness after being housed.

Overall, the experiences and outcomes of WA respondents indicate complex, multidimensional needs. These needs will differ from person to person, thus the supports offered need to be adaptable and person-centred, accepting that the journey out of homelessness is not likely to be linear.

Policy Settings and Progress in Ending Homelessness

In 2019, the WA Government released *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030* (the Strategy). In many ways, the Strategy reinforces the WAAEH 10-Year Strategy to End Homelessness: it adopts a whole-of-community approach, integrates Housing First principles, has an initial focus on rough sleeping and chronic homelessness, works towards a No Wrong Door approach, and focuses on prevention and early intervention.

To implement the policy, the WA Government has made significant investment across a number of homelessness initiatives. These include, but are not limited to, increasing significantly new social housing stock and refurbishing existing stock, building two Common Ground facilities, developing a blueprint for a No Wrong Door approach to service delivery, and the Housing First Homelessness Initiative (HFHI) which includes important initiatives in terms of strengthening Aboriginal controlled community organisation engagement.

The homelessness service system is also actively working across a number of initiatives to address homelessness and to break the cycle of homelessness for people experiencing family and domestic violence and for people leaving prison. COVID-19 also saw the introduction of several rapid housing initiatives, the momentum of which several service providers have sought to continue.

Where to from Here?

Since the launch of the WAAEH Strategy, the focus in WA has moved to an end homelessness agenda and a Housing First approach. Undoubtedly, a significant amount of money has been invested and a number of initiatives are in place. Further, many of these are recent, and thus we will expect to see changes in the size, structure, and nature of homelessness in WA in the future. Despite the good progress being made, our examination of recent trends on homelessness and the current state of play of homelessness in WA highlights just how far we need to go before we achieve our WAAEH targets and the overall goal of ending homelessness. Our Ending Homelessness in WA report[4] details the progress being made but more needs to be done. If we are to end homelessness, our focus must be on:

1. Adequately supporting rough sleepers to access permanent housing (in many cases with long-term supportive housing) while social housing stock is being developed. Those experiencing homelessness, particularly those who have had long periods rough sleeping, the level of need is particularly high.

2. Responses in regional and remote areas of WA need to be expanded but nuanced and specialised, and therefore resourced appropriately.

3. Early onset child, adolescent and youth homelessness need to be addressed to stop the flow into adult homelessness and the long-term drivers of homelessness need to be addressed.

A clear, consistent and long-term agenda on homelessness at the federal level, and facilitation of social impact investment into housing in WA would facilitate efforts to end homelessness. There is a critical need for a more proactive response from the Australian Government (which has been largely silent on homelessness), for increased supply of low-cost housing targeted for vulnerable households both in the social housing sector and the private rental market and a significant push into preventative policies and programs to address family, childhood and youth homelessness.

Endnotes

1. Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness 2018, *The Western Australian Strategy to End Homelessness*, *https://www.endhomelessnesswa.com/strategy*
2. Flatau P, Lester L, Fairthorne J, Minto K, Mok K and Calli Z 2021, *The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness Outcomes Measurement and Evaluation Framework: Dashboard*. Version 3.0 July 2021, The University of Western Australia, Centre for Social Impact, Perth.
3. Seivwright A, Lester L, Fairthorne J, Vallesi S, Callis Z, Flatau P 2021, *The Western Australian Alliance to End Homelessness: Ending Homelessness in Western Australia 2021*. Version 2.0 August 2021, The University of Western Australia, Centre for Social Impact, Perth.
4. Ibid.

Moorditj Mia (Strong Home): Aboriginal Housing First Support from the Heart

Lara Silbert, Grants and Fundraising Officer, Noongar Mia Mia

Perth is facing an urgent Aboriginal homelessness crisis, and Aboriginal-led community-driven solutions are the key to change. Despite comprising 1.6 per cent of Perth Metro's population, an estimated 42 per cent of the city's rough sleepers are Aboriginal;[1] in other words, Aboriginal people are 25 times more likely to be sleeping rough in Perth compared to the non-Aboriginal population — an enormous overrepresentation. Research from the University of Western Australia (UWA) finds of 56 homeless street deaths in Perth in 2020, 28 per cent were Indigenous.[2]

> *'Our family would like my sister's death to be the last homeless person on the streets… Family hurts too when things like this happen. And it hurts here. I'd never walked past a person who's homeless, because I know that … they need help.'*
>
> — Michelle Garlett, sister of Alana Garlett (rough-sleeping Noongar woman and mother of six who died on Perth's streets in June 2021)[3]

Western Australia's first Aboriginal Housing First Support Service, Moorditj Mia ('Strong Home'; hereafter, MM), demonstrates a promising foray into self-determination in action. Launched in mid-2021 as a result of a partnership between two Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), Noongar Mia Mia (NMM) and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation, the MM program has been funded by Western Australian State Government for a five-year period.

The program builds on the evidence-based cultural approach of these two leading Aboriginal organisations, as well as deep insight developed over a cumulative five decades of experience working within the Aboriginal community on Noongar *boodja* (country). The program is also underpinned by the *Noongar Cultural Framework and Noongar Housing First Principles* (introduced in the November 2021 edition of *Parity*); simultaneously, the on-the-ground realities of MM's casework demonstrates what the theoretical basis of the Framework and Principles could look like in action, and is being used to develop a service model for practical implementation.

Working in a culturally-secure, effective way with Aboriginal people on Noongar *boodja* facing homelessness means working differently. It means putting Noongar cultural values at the front-and-centre of the way we work; involving Aboriginal people meaningfully in the design and delivery of services; and understanding where to step back and let Aboriginal people lead the way.

Background

The Department of Communities' WA Homelessness Strategy acknowledges *'non-Aboriginal people['s] ways are not culturally effective and do not offer long-term solutions for addressing homelessness in Aboriginal communities. Self-determination and self-management are still relevant today as when it was first proposed in the 1970s to empower and take control to overcome homelessness.'* Despite the critical importance of self-determination being well-established for half a century, little has changed in terms of meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal voices in the housing sector. This contravenes Article 23 (Right to Development) of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, to which Australia is a signatory:

> *'Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.'*

The Organisations

Noongar Mia Mia (NMM) is an ACCO Community Housing Provider, (CHP) that has been at the frontline of Aboriginal social housing for over two decades. NMM has been formally recognised as the peak housing body for Aboriginal people on Noongar *boodja*. NMM provides supportive housing, addressing homelessness risk factors from a place of cultural and personal respect.

Wungening provides culturally strong, community informed and delivered services, across a wide breadth of areas including alcohol and other drugs (AOD). Originally set up in 1988 to respond to the challenge of AOD amongst the Noongar community, Wungening now delivers a wide array of services for the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community, in areas such as family and domestic violence, homelessness, child and family support, and emergency relief.

> *'These organisations and their staff have a deep and holistic understanding of the challenges that many Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness face.'*
>
> — Simone McGurk MLA

The organisations work in partnership to deliver both MM and the Boorloo Bidee Mia ('Perth Pathway to Housing') homelessness facility, two of the world's scant few Aboriginal-led Housing First services. Together, they build self-determination in the housing and homelessness sectors, while growing cultural competency so these sectors can better serve Aboriginal people on Noongar *boodja*.

The MM Service Model

In developing the MM service model, the partners have used a tailored methodology considering:

- customer (service user) insights
- organisational strengths
- key individuals from both organisations with significant breadth and depth of experience, knowledge and skills resulting from decades of delivering services to Aboriginal people across the broader community services sector; including to Aboriginal people who are homeless or at-risk
- desktop research of good practice on Aboriginal homelessness; homelessness; housing first.

Aboriginal people and communities have well-established values and protocols which the MM team respects, understands and places front-and-centre in their work. A guiding principle is the importance of connections — to land, place, family and kinship, culture, identity, spirit. Furthermore, the team is entirely Aboriginal,[4] with deep understanding of the importance of cultural values and the lasting impacts of colonialism — disconnection from home, family, language and spirituality. Because MM comes from the community, there is a sense of shared ownership and common goals, and the team is uniquely placed to overcome barriers and build relationships of trust.

The MM service model reflects Wungening's stakeholder consultation workshop in November 2020 with people rough sleeping at the Lord Street 'Tent City', with Aboriginal Elders and concerned community members, regarding current housing and specialist homelessness support services. Key insights (quoted verbatim) below and are reflected in the six domains of our service model.

Two of the Telethon Elder Coresearchers Charmaine Pell and Oriel Green over at our office with board member Denise Conway

Customer Insights Workshop (Source: Wungening Aboriginal Corporation)

1. *I just came out of prison and need a house*

   Child protection is looking at me

   No-one cares and no one wants to help me

   My relationship broke down

   I'm black, just need a break, and no-one wants to give me a house

   I'm hopeless and helpless

   Because I'm using, no one wants to know/help me. I've been kicked out of my home 'cause I've been drinking

   I don't have a space where people listen to me/hear me out

   I fight with my mob

   No one understands me or knows my story

   You/everyone thinks I'm no good so I might as well behave that way

   I can't change but want to; how do I change?

   I'm not white, I'm not educated

   My family and others don't want me

   I've been in and out of homelessness services; I don't trust anyone around me

   What are YOU going to do for ME?

   I want to sleep and be safe

2. *Allocation — where I want to live is really important to me (i.e. the location)*

   I want to be near facilities I use every day — like public transport

   There's family feuding I need to think about when given a house

   The place (location) has to have happy memories for me

   There are a lot of questions we should be asking up front when allocating a house — this part is SO important — it's different to the whitefella community. You don't really have this with the white fella community (i.e. cultural aspects to consider when allocating a house)

   Where all our mob live — you don't have houses in these areas. You don't have the concentration of houses where our people are.

   I'll be offered a house and I'll have to turn it down 'cause it ain't

culturally appropriate and then I get put to the bottom of the list 'cause I turned it down and have to start from the beginning again

Your staff aren't our mob — how do they know what we need?

3. *There's lots of things going on for me now — I don't even wanna go find a house*

   I can't be bothered finding a house

   Just give me a house so I can get on with me life — get my woman back, get my kids back

   *Centrelink has cut off my money. Can't you help me? Centrelink is f***ing useless*

   Why do people keep knocking me back for a house? Why did I get knocked back for a house?

   I know where I have to go and who to see to get a house... but the wait list is so long so what's the point?

   Where do I go to find a place/ house? How do I get a home? Where do I go? What do I need?

   How much will it cost?

   But I don't have any furniture

   Do I have to go through this all again (forms, questions)? Don't you guys talk to each other?

   What good are you guys? You guys are useless. You're meant to help us black fellas

   I've tried to get a house but don't have the documents.

   I don't want to just take what they've given me. It's no good.

   I thought I was on the wait list and now I see I'm not.

   I've always just take what the Dept has given us as a house.

4. *I've got to get my kids to school.*

   They make me feel shame (with my life — 'quick help me clean the house up, white fellas coming in and they'll judge me on state of how clean the house is')

   This is all harder than what I've done before — setting up a house is hard work, and I don't know where to start — I need your help

   I need help to get the rental agreement set up and sorted out

   Getting the house set up — I need help with this. I need to get furniture, the electricity set up, all the basics you need to do before you move in.

   This transition to a permanent house is a big area to deal with (i.e. preparing people to move into a home). It can be such an overwhelming feeling for our mob.

   I also need to get food on the table. It's all too overwhelming and I don't know where to start.

   We have the expectation of family to deal with: I've got a house now — do I bring my family in and house them as well? So I not tell anybody? Can't say no when my family needs a bed.

5. *What happens in between finding a house and getting the individual the support they need?*

   There is a housing gap for our mob — there are no hostels and some of our mob like this set up.

   How does crisis/transitional accommodation fit in with this? Crisis/transitional tends to be cyclical and you keep going back to the beginning.

   I need support now — I know I haven't got a house yet but I need support now.

   I want you to help my aunty, brother, sister, cousin etc, cos they need help more than me right now.

   You're talking to me now about finding a house — I don't really care about a house now 'cause 'this' (whatever event/ situation) has happened to me and I need help with that now.

   You mob just wanna help your family — I know what you're like. You just support drug dealers.

   I rang up and spoke to some girl and she told me to do xyz but why can't you do it for me?

Giving out packs to rough sleepers

I wanna change my life and clean up my life (get off the grog/drugs, get my missus/kids back etc). How can you help?

Filled out the form — Is that it? Is that all I had to do?

Why do I have to fill out this paperwork now?

You should have my details. I filled out the forms last time.

Why do I have to come to you guys — you aren't the ones with the houses.

6. *Who do I call when it's out of hours and I need support?*

What matters to me is how people talk to me and interact/engage with me. It should be with respect.

I want you to work with me and help me get a better life and not just tell me what to do or put me down.

I want to be left alone. I've got my house and I'm all good now.

Nag, nag, nag. That's all you do — you don't really listen to me to hear me out.

I need some extra support right now — life is pretty shit (wrap around support)

Why do you send me to so many people? I want to stick with you, cos I trust you.

'One Dream, One Team'

The MM team takes a 'one team, one dream' approach; regardless which partner an MM caseworker is employed by, they identify personally and collectively as MM. They are recognised by clients as a unified group. Casework aligns with Aboriginal preferences for a community of collective care; caseworkers always go out in groups of two to three people, with a key caseworker and one or two rotating caseworkers. This means any client should know any caseworker, and any caseworker should know any client. This also mitigates turnover fatigue; already-exhausted vulnerable people do not have to repeat their story and find themselves starting again from the beginning (often the case in conventional interventions).

The MM Service Model in Practice

The MM team finds the six domains highly relevant in their day-to-day work. In particular, building relationships has been key to engagement. These relationships are built through trust, yarning and sitting with, and without blame or shame; they come with an agenda, without power dynamics of 'rescuer' and 'rescued', and in a way that empowers the client.

Six Domains of Service

Domain	*Key insights*
Relationship:	Building a relationship is the most important thing. When this is established then it is ok to move onto the 'topic' at hand.
Shame:	Our own people sometimes feel shame and don't want to talk about their circumstances; and sometimes don't want to talk to our own people either
Trust:	Build trust with us and then we will start opening up — not before then – and this may take time but you can't give up
Yarning:	When yarning (talking) with us start with who's your mob, your family… etc. Get to know us by yarning with us
Sitting with:	It will probably take a long time to 'get a toe in'; make sure your message is clear and repeat it over and over — 'I am here to help.' 'Sit on the street, everyone has a story.'
Approach:	It's the way you approach people that will make us want to talk. 'Don't wear flash clothes' and 'uniforms can intimidate.'

Shame and Trust

Kaarnya (shame) is discussed in detail in the November issue of *Parity* ('Noongar Cultural Framework and Noongar Housing First Principles'); in particular, this involves harm reduction and empowerment, engaging and re-engaging without blame or shame, taking small steps forward and backward celebrating successful experiences but also learning from experiences of pain and frustration without kaarnya. Clients are heavily traumatised and dispossessed – not only of land, but even of a safe roof over their heads. Many are Stolen Generations themselves or the children of Stolen Generations parents; many have experienced child abuse and/or family and domestic violence. Even talking about their situation can be very triggering, and significant trust and sitting with is required before caseworkers can break down those barriers. This process takes as long as it takes, and it must be client-led.

Yarning and Sitting With

The way that caseworkers yarn is underpinned by cultural sensitivity, values and protocol. The shared Aboriginality of the casework team and the clients opens doors, but cultural sensitivity and protocols must still be followed, and casework must be delivered based on shared Aboriginal constructs and values — walking together in the same world. In particular, working from a shared understanding of the importance of *moort* (family and kin), *boodja* and *kaartdijin* (cultural knowledge), how these interconnect and where our clients are placed within these networks (See: 'Noongar Cultural Framework', *Parity* November 2021 edition, pages 16 to 20). As such, MM caseworkers will follow the Noongar cultural protocol of starting by asking about their mob (family), establishing shared kinship ties, etc.

'Yarn, don't be a rescuer… People want their power back.'
— Leonie Pickett, MM Program Coordinator

Yarning and sitting with effectively should create a relationship in which the client feels empowered. Clients do not want to be 'rescued' and are likely to find frontline workers who take that stance to be patronising and insulting. Rough sleepers often feel voiceless

and invisible and lose a sense of identity; on the streets, passers-by actively look away so as not to see them. MM's work involves giving them back their voice, empowering them with choice and self-determination; and walking with them until they feel powerful enough to walk by themselves — never walking in front of them or behind them.

O ur receptionist Shauna Parfitt with some Xmas gifts for tenants

As we will see in *Noongar Housing First Principles in Practice* (this issue, pages 30 to 34), regaining identity and voice can be something tangible like identification documents, or something of great intangible value like self-determination in location of housing, or finding ways to use lived experience to help others.

Housing First Support in a Housing Crisis

MM Mia is a long-term Housing First support service of five years' duration. State Government housing investments are still in progress. The service is being delivered consistently with Housing First, and finding housing is the highest priority element of MM's work; however, housing remains scare in the midst of WA's rental crisis. MM thinks outside-the-box to find housing, working with organisations such as Department of Communities, Anglicare, Communicare, Indigo Junction, Boorloo Midee Mia and private market affordable housing provider Urban Fabric to find safe, secure housing for clients. This involves not making promises that you cannot keep, in alignment with the Kwop Daa ('good talk' that is open and honest) element of the Noongar Housing First Principles (*Parity* November 2021 edition, pages 21 to 23).

The lack of guaranteed housing initially meant overcoming understandable skepticism. Rough sleepers would ask questions like: 'there's lots of services out there — what makes you any different? If you don't have a house for me, what can you help with?' However, not only MM have had some successes in finding housing, but the team has also been of service in other ways. Gaining or re-gaining ID documents and getting placed on the priority housing waitlist have been particularly important achievements, but support can take many forms: whether having a yarn, providing transport, or even attending court to advocate for clients (which recently helped prevent a prison term).

As a result, positive word-of-mouth has spread quickly about the service, paving the way to build relationships of trust from initial contact. The team has demonstrated ongoing commitments: that they will never give up on finding clients a home. They are known for finding other ways to be of genuine help and support, and that they are part of a strong Noongar and Aboriginal community that sees them and values them. This aligns with the Noongar Housing First Principle 'Culturally appropriate active engagement through Kwop Daa'; rough sleepers who have been exhausted by services and workers that make promises but do not deliver, know that the MM team will walk together with them on their journeys.

Systems Change: From the Streets to the Sector

The way the MM team works also reflects NMM's Mia Moort ('House Family') ongoing research project. So far, this has involved the development of the *Noongar Cultural Framework and Noongar Housing First Principles*. The Framework expresses cultural values of Noongar people, identifying points of disjuncture between Noongar and settler cultural values, and how this disjuncture can place pressure upon Noongar and Aboriginal people to make untenable cultural compromises to stay housed. The Noongar Housing First Principles are a set of principles which reflect these cultural values, reimagining the mainstream Housing First Principles in a culturally-effective fashion.

Mia Moort and MM have a significant collaborative relationship: the MM team can work more culturally-effectively with this understanding, while the day-to-day frontline work with a caseload of 40 Aboriginal rough sleepers[5] forms an evidence basis from which Mia Moort can develop a service model for practical implementation. By yarning with the MM team about the on-the-ground realities of their work, Mia Moort can take the next stage of the project: ensuring Mia Moort goes beyond a theoretical basis by delivering training both to leadership and frontline workers across the housing and support sectors, for meaningful systems change.

> *'There have been many reports written about Noongar people, about Aboriginal peoples across Australia; but a report alone will not drive the change that so desperately needs to be seen, changes that as Elders we have been pushing for, for decades now. Changing a system isn't an easy task, and this change has been put in the too-hard basket for too long. Continuation of* [Mia Moort] *will enable* [Sandra Harben] *to actively present, teach and inspire the Housing and Support sectors all around WA.'*
>
> — Telethon Kids Institute Ngulluk Koolunga Ngulluk Koort (Our Children, Our Heart) Elders.

Endnotes

1. *https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2021/08/Boorloo-Bidee-Mia-homelessness-service-opens-in-Perth-CBD.aspx*
2. *https://nit.com.au/indigenous-death-highlights-urgency-of-wa-homelessness-crisis/*
3. *https://nit.com.au/indigenous-death-highlights-urgency-of-wa-homelessness-crisis/*
4. Currently Aboriginality is not a hiring requirement, but deep understanding of Aboriginal culture and context is.
5. As part of serving Aboriginal rough sleepers, the Moorditj Mia team also serves their partners, some of whom are not Aboriginal.

Noongar Housing First Principles in Practice

Lara Silbert, Grants and Fundraising Officer, Noongar Mia Mia,
Michael Hansen, Joshua Moody and Kay Ayton, Caseworkers, Moorditj Mia

The Noongar Housing First Principles (NHFP) are a set of Housing First Principles adapted from the international Housing First model to meet the specific personal and cultural needs of Noongar and Aboriginal people on Noongar country, Southwest Western Australia. These Principles have come about as a result of the need to adapt the Housing First models to reflect these needs, so as to better address the extremely disproportionate rate of Aboriginal homelessness in Australia. The need to adopt a cultural lens has been identified by the mainstream Housing First movement in Australia, with co-author of the Housing First Principles for Australia Leah Watkins calling for further research into a culturally-effective approach for Australia's Aboriginal people; similarly, Ali Hamlin-Paenga, the president of Kahungunu Whānau Services (the only Māori social housing provider in Wellington, New Zealand) highlights that the mainstream model fails to deliver a culturally-effective tangata-whenua [people of the land] approach.[1]

The need for culturally-effective solutions to Aboriginal homelessness is especially acute in WA, where an Aboriginal person is approximately 13 times more likely to be homeless than a non-Aboriginal person. In the Perth Metropolitan area, home to 41 per cent of the Aboriginal population of WA, an Aboriginal person is a 25 times more likely to be street-present than a non-Aboriginal person.[2] These shocking statistics demonstrate that, as the WA Homelessness Strategy acknowledges: *'non-Aboriginal people's ways are not culturally effective and do not offer long-term solutions for addressing homelessness in Aboriginal communities.'*[3]

As a result, Noongar Mia Mia (NMM); Perth's only Aboriginal social housing provider) has been conducting research on a culturally-effective approach, involving Elders, Noongar lived experience advocates, frontline workers from NMM and partner Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Wungening, and stakeholders from the mainstream housing and support sectors. This work has culminated in the Noongar Housing First Principles. Please note that these are not intended as a stand-alone piece of work; they are grounded in the Noongar Cultural Framework, and should be reviewed in conjunction with that Framework to understand the cultural values and norms behind the Principles. Both can be found in the November 2021 edition of *Parity*, and in a full report on the Noongar Mia Mia website.[4]

Together, these works form a strong theoretical basis, but theory alone is not enough to enact change. Noongar Mia Mia is taking its next steps, working with the Noongar community and stakeholders from the Housing First movement to develop a service model of what the Housing First Principles look like in practice; what it looks like when housing and support sector stakeholders work from the heart, and value culture as a treasured birthright, a key strength and a protective force.

In the following case studies, we will explore what the Principles look like on the ground, in the form of stories by three frontline caseworkers from the Moorditj Mia (MM) program, Michael Hansen, Kay Ayton and Joshua Moody (all Noongar people). MM is WA's first Aboriginal Housing First Support Service, and is operated by two ACCOs — Noongar Mia Mia (lead agency) and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation — through a cultural approach to Housing First, grounded in the Principles. These two case studies involve a Noongar man, a Noongar woman and a Noongar couple, all of whom are rough sleepers who were living at the same homeless camp in Perth. We will explore how the caseworkers have adopted the Principles organically in their work, particularly in terms of working from the heart to overcome barriers that were previously presented as insurmountable, and through active engagement with personal and cultural respect.

Derek*

Caseworker: Michael Hansen

> *'I used to be nobody, now I am a someone.'*

Derek had been sleeping on the streets for eight years when we met. It was my first day on the job doing outreach as a caseworker from Moorditj Mia, and I went together with another caseworker to an area where we knew some of the homeless mob hang out – to reach out, say hello and have a yarn. As soon as they saw us coming, they thought we were police or someone there to move them on or cause them trouble, so they ran. But Derek stopped, looked at me and turned back.

> *'Something made me stop and turn back and listen.'*
>
> — Derek

Derek didn't have any ID, and he'd approached Centrelink and Communities and they'd just told him no, we can't help you. So he didn't even have the basic income support that every Australian has the right to; and he wasn't on the housing waitlist either. That meant that getting ID was a top priority, but first, I wanted to

get him off the streets and find him a house. Luckily, we stuck it out together and we didn't take no for an answer, and it turned out it wasn't that hard to turn a no into a yes — with a statutory declaration form, we could get him on the priority housing waitlist. After eight years of Derek slipping through the cracks, there was finally a way forward – and it's painful to think that it took that long when the fix was so simple.

We've had our ups and downs; when another client from the homeless camp he lives in was housed first, he was really angry with me, but I understood how he felt, and I didn't just walk away or say 'no, this is too hard', and in the end that brought us closer. Sometimes we look back thinking how different things would've been if he hadn't turned back that day! Now, he's safe in a unit of his own, and he's got ID, and he's on Centrelink. He knows he's got somewhere to turn when he needs it, too.

He's still often over in that spot yarning with the homeless mob that became his community during those years; actually, they're so important to his life that he made it clear that if there was a housing offer far away from them, he wouldn't be able to take it. So we waited and we found the right home for him, near the people that matter to him.

When Derek first got his ID, he told me that all these years, he'd felt like without being able to prove who he was, he was just no-one, that he didn't matter. Now, with his ID, "I'm a someone". He tells the other homeless mob what a good job I've done, that even when we can't always get the houses sorted, Moorditj Mia aren't the kinds of people who give up on the people we support.

Society made Derek feel like he wasn't valuable; and it's an honour that I can work every day in a job where I can remind people that yes, they're someone. They're our mob, they matter, and I won't stop doing my best to make sure they get seen.

Linkage to Noongar Housing First Principles

Principle 1

Derek didn't just want any home, and a roof over his head wasn't enough; he wanted a home that met his cultural and social need to be with his mob, in a specific location (an Aboriginal homelessness encampment, where he still spends his time). Michael understood and respected Derek's right to a permanent, self-contained home meeting his needs, and that for Derek, a sustainable home must be accessible to the people who matter to him.

Principle 2

Support was flexible. Michael understood that Derek values his homeless mob as a support network. Michael built a relationship from the heart that continues to this day, and even when Derek was angry with Michael and was almost at the point of telling him to go away and never return, Michael understood Derek's unique set of circumstances and behaved with compassion and kindness. Michael helped to unlock choices from doors that were previously closed to Derek; rather than taking 'no' for an answer from Centrelink and Department of Communities, he fought to overcome obstacles and advocate for Derek.

Principle 3

Derek knew where he wanted to live, and that the location and people he felt connected to would make him stronger. Michael understood and respected that at all times.

Principle 4

Michael didn't see a 'no-one'; he saw someone valuable, part of his mob, someone let down by a system and who deserved *koorndarn* (respect) and a home. Michael never made Derek feel shame (*kaarnya*), and never made false promises, but rather engaged with Derek as a person; when someone else in the homeless encampment got housing before Derek did, Derek felt that he wasn't practicing *kwop daa* (good talk), and that made Derek angry and put their relationship at risk. Michael was empathetic and worked from the heart to protect their relationship and rebuild trust, rather than giving up.

Principle 5

Wirrin (spirit) is key in this case study, both in terms of spirituality and a solid spirit. Derek felt like he was no-one, his *wirrin* was broken. With Michael's support, he felt he was heard, that he mattered, that he was someone. He regained hope and felt seen again. The 'something made me turn back' can be seen through a spiritual lens: the *kwop wirrin* (good spirits) protecting Derek and sparking a relationship from the heart between Derek and Michael.

Principle 6

Michael applied cultural protocol when working with Derek, yarning about culture and kin. He understood that Derek belongs to a community of support in the form of his homeless mob, and didn't pass judgement on who should matter to him as mainstream workers might have done in those circumstances.

Maree: recovering from substance abuse, and back with three of her children

Caseworker: Joshua Moody

Maree is a single mother of three who had developed substance abuse and lost it all, her kids, her Dept of Communities Home and sadly most of all, she lost her way. She had been rough sleeping and couch surfing for three years staying with family when she can. Her kids were being looked after by her Aunty who never gave up hope that Maree would one day get back on her feet and be the good mother and strong independent woman, she knows she can be. After three years of substance abuse and the homelessness lifestyle she was stuck in, Maree had to make the most important choice of her life, to continue down that path? or to make her way back to her kids? Maree chose her kids and done everything she needed to do to get back into their lives. With a reality check and a strong mind Maree had to get her life back together and overcome her barriers. Coming to terms with her options she realised that she now had a huge debt with Department of Communities and is not even on their waitlist, so her housing chances seemed small. She decided that she had to get over her drug addiction for a start to restoring her family. Maree looked up Wungening AOD and signed up for six months attending counselling and courses every day and she loved it.

Maree had approached many service providers for housing and family accommodation, but she hadn't been able to find any homelessness support for families, and no-one seemed

able to meet her needs. Moorditj Mia first received Maree's referral from Wungening AOD in May, and I was appointed as her case worker. After a month of case work and seeing what services are out there, I found Anglicare's family assistance program and called them up — they said they take 10 families at a time and if you get in quick, you might be able to get a spot. So, I headed straight out to Lockridge to Maree and got her to fill out the form, and I brought it straight back to the office and managed to get her onto that tenth spot.

From there it was a waiting game as Maree has been put on a waitlist. To remain on that waitlist, she had to call Anglicare every two weeks to let them know she was still keen. I put it on my calendar to call Maree every two weeks to encourage and remind her that she needed to call them to keep her spot. Two months later, Maree received the phone call from Anglicare saying that there is a three bedroom home available, but she needs to be on the Department of Communities priority waitlist to be accepted into this property. I told her don't worry, we will get you on priority, so I did up a support letter and went to Red Dawn Advocacy asked them for one, as well as asking Maree to get her doctor to do one, then I took her into the Midland Department of Communities to apply and inform them of Maree's situation with the Anglicare program. That worked in our favour, because after three hours of filling in forms and waiting in that office they accepted Maree onto priority which gave Anglicare the okay to proceed with her application. I'd also put in an application for Starting Over Support (SOS) to fully furnish the property for Maree for when she moves in. In mid-October, Maree and her kids moved into a fully furnished three-bedroom home thanks to SOS and Anglicare, and my working from the heart as well. Even though ideally Maree would have liked to live in the Lockridge area with kin, her immediate priority was to be with her children again. She's now been living there for four weeks, and her children moved in immediately and they are loving it.

Maree's currently in the process of transitioning from Jobseeker Allowance to Parenting Payment; for the last month she's been supporting a family of three on a single jobseeker's income. She has nothing spare even to feed herself and her children. So now I'm working with her to meet her immediate needs — bringing food hampers to her from Foodbank and Perth Homeless Support Group. Maree is now substance-free and looking forward to a brighter future, together with her children. The recovery process is difficult, and I'm working closely to support her — she talks to me when she's feeling vulnerable or facing a crisis. When a Job Active Provider wanted her to do job-readiness activities for five hours a day, I was there to help advocate for her.

Wilson is two hours return from Lockridge on public transport, and she plans to return home one day. But she sees her move in a positive way, as something that will enable her to do good for others. Her home is only a few km away from Perth's main Aboriginal-led registered training organisation (RTO), Marr Moorditj, and she intends to complete mental health qualifications there, to support others facing mental health challenges. When she first moved to Wilson, she was vaguely aware that Marr Moorditj existed and was nearby; when I pointed out how close it was, we looked over the course options together and she decided that studying a mental health course would be perfect; after all, the course is designed and delivered by her community, enabling its students to serve their community. She's excited at what seemed like a perfect opportunity to take the next steps in forging her path. She's hoping to start with the next intake in February.

From the beginning of their work together, I felt that Maree was a strong, resilient, and driven woman who was determined to fix her life, and just needed the right supports to get there; a service that would see her not only as an individual, but as a mother with children, and would help her navigate supports that would actually work for her and her family.

Linkage to Noongar Housing First Principles

Principle 1

Maree is reunited with her children, and while she has accepted a home away from *boodjar*, there was no coercion involved. With Josh's support, she now plans to study mental health at an Aboriginal-led RTO that understands and celebrates culture.

Kaartdijin (cultural knowledge and wisdom) isn't only stories or about the past; it's a living thing that interconnects the past, present and future. In this case it incorporates the Noongar Grapevine that enabled Josh to know about Marr Moorditj in the first place and share that cultural knowledge with Maree; it also incorporates cultural knowledge of mental health, which in turn incorporates Aboriginal ways of working, cultural values surrounding *koort* (caring, working from the heart), and shared understandings and experiences.

Furthermore, cultural connections are reflected in Maree's desire to make contributing to the individual and collective wellbeing of her community into her life's work.

Principle 2

Maree and her children have been supported holistically by her *moort* (family), and Josh understands that this is an important factor for the collective wellbeing of herself, her children and her extended family. He understands that returning to Midland/Lockridge in the future is an important part of her collective wellbeing, and has not coerced her to accept housing elsewhere; furthermore, he has informed her of an Aboriginal-led RTO and given her choices that give her dreams and hopes for the future.

Maree had a specific service need and had approached many organisations that could not help her. Josh acted in a flexible way, turning 'no' into yes, finding services that would fit her needs, rather than telling her what she needed. He also took a flexible approach to finding a way to overcome her housing debt so that she could be priority waitlisted.

Maree's needs have changed during this transitory period into Parenting Payment, and the way he supports Maree has changed; he helps her find food, supports her emotionally through this period of financial stress and substance recovery, and advocates for her as she overcomes bureaucratic obstacles (Centrelink catching up with her lived reality as a mother supporting three children; JobActive not recognising her needs as a recovering addict). As Maree's needs change, Josh will be there to support her.

Principle 3

Maree has defined for herself what makes a home; she has been empowered to make choices about her family makeup and what services she requires. Josh works with Maree in a person-centered way that is responsive to her needs and dreams; and supported her in her road to substance abuse recovery from a lens of harm minimisation.

Principle 4.

No blame or shame — Josh sees a strong and resilient woman who deserves *koorndarn* (respect). Rather than making hollow promises, or just saying no, he's looked for ways of making yes happen.

Principle 5

Maree and Josh have worked together to recognise her unique strengths. They've identified ways that she can turn her lived experiences, and her current displacement, into something positive. She is hopeful, dreaming of a brighter future, and gaining a sense of purpose. Many other service providers have just given her a 'no'; Josh worked with her to understand her needs and navigate what's out there, working from the heart for the best outcome for her and her family.

Principle 6

She is exploring an education at an institution by her mob, for her mob, grounded in culture. Rather than potentially feeling like an outsider or experiencing a high cultural load, she would be studying with other Noongar and Aboriginal people. As she settles into her new home, Josh will continue to help her find opportunities to connect with country, culture, kin and community, so she can choose to participate as little or as much as she would like to.

Heather and Sam's Story

Caseworker: Kay Ayton

When I first met Heather and Sam*, they were living in a homeless camp in the bushland, the same camp as Derek* and Maree. Heather had heard we do good work, so she reached out and we met up at a nearby Aboriginal community hub. She cried the whole way through telling her story — her kids have an 18-year order from the Department of Child Protection (DCP), she can't see them unsupervised until they grow up. She's been living in the bush with Sam (her husband of 20 years) for two and a half years; the kids lived with them in the bush awhile, still going to school, getting teased for living in the bush.

Heather told me, *'I'm just so sick of living like this, I need a home… I'm so depressed'* Her and Sam were coming to terms with the idea that rough sleeping might be their whole future, for the rest of their lives; they were losing hope, deteriorating as human beings, losing their *wirrin*.

She's been trying to get housed, but she's banned from the Department of Communities office because she gets upset. But she's upset because she needs a roof over her head. She goes to the DCP office and has supervised visits with the kids, and to a local (mainstream-led but very culturally-secure) centre for women's healing and recovery. She paints and relaxes, yarns with the other ladies there, a close knit, diverse community of *blackfulla*, *wadjela* and CALD ladies, mostly with shared experiences of DV.

Sam is domestically violent; he's stopped hitting in the last few years but the verbal abuse is ongoing. So I asked her first if she's comfortable with me supporting Sam too. I've taken care to make sure he knows he's my client in his own right, I want great things for him too. I feel he really needs healing too; he mentioned he'd like to look into applying for redress (money for when you've been mistreated in the care system).

Other caseworkers might try to break them up, not respect Heather's choices. I practice what I've been taught about harm minimisation, understanding trauma, working with Sam to find better ways.

When I told them we'd found a home, they were just over the moon! I told them *'I'm so happy with you — the only way is up from here! Whatever your goals are, I want to help you achieve them. You're both my mob, you matter to me'*. They were happy to take a house anywhere, so they're a bit far from home; but they reckon it's good in its own way, being far away from everyone to heal and come back when they're ready.

When they first moved in, they only had a single mattress they'd shared out in the bush. Starting Over Support (SOS) furnished the place right up — Heather and Sam couldn't believe it! She rang me to say *'can you hear us, we're* djerapin [happy]*! We've got a house with beautiful gum trees, with a washing machine and electricity, I can charge my phone up myself at last!'* Sam was so happy to

lie down on a comfy sofa instead of a rug on the ground. Those little things people normally take for granted just meant the world. We got a letter from the SOS drivers later on, saying Heather and Sam were respectful and kind, so happy, grateful and excited — it just made their day!

Christmas is coming up in a couple of weeks, and Heather's just so thrilled, so full of energy. They haven't done anything for Christmas for the last few years; they had nowhere to do it and it was too depressing without the kids. They were ashamed of rough sleeping, too. Now they've got a home, they feel worthy. They are having their first Christmas next week, going out with their oldest for Christmas lunch. She's over 18, and hasn't really been in touch in recent years; they are just so happy to be reconnecting. They feel like they're starting to belong in the world again.

With a stable place to call home, they're reconnecting to family that's passed. Heather was so close with her dad, and hasn't felt emotionally ready to visit her dad's grave; we're going out together to pay respects in cultural ways, have that spiritual healing time. Same for Sam, who didn't find out his father had passed until years after it happened. I love that they're reconnecting to their family and their roots, making their wirrin strong.

They've got hope now, ideas bubbling up — they're dreaming again. They've never had licenses so we're taking them to study for their L-plates next year. I told them, this house isn't the end. I'm here whenever they need me, to help them find and chase their dreams. I can tell that on the horizon, they're going to be a success story and live happy lives.

I really care about them, which means I can take care of them — emotionally and spiritually — as they rebuild, reconnect with the past, imagine the future, start having wants and dreams. Now they're thinking about getting jobs; not long ago they were figuring out where the next meal is coming from. They're blossoming, taking baby steps — encouraged all the way. And Sam wants to stand up for his people, for men like him, to heal from trauma. I've always told him, *'we need more of our men to heal and stand up'*. I'm so happy he wants to be a role model.

Building trust has been a big part of this process — the world's let them down. So I've been honest throughout, telling them early on I won't give false hope. *'If I can do it I will; if I can't, I'll tell you.' Leticia* [caseworker] *and I have always been very authentic about who we are; we all yarn and giggle together, just being people and friendly. I've opened up about my lived experience, what I've overcome to achieve what I have, what's possible. We hug and kiss when we see each other; we respect each other as people.'* Part of that is about empowering them to make choices; I told them let's do the things you like, I don't want to be like Big Brother watching you, I'm not a judgmental person.

Heather and Sam came to the office with some chockies they'd bought for us to say thank you, and they told me that all this time no-one's ever really had positivity in their lives till MM came in and stuck with them. That's what it's all about — I love doing what I do and being able to change lives for the better.

Linkage to Noongar Housing First Principles

Principle One

Heather and Sam are reconnecting to their oldest daughter, and hope to reconnect with their children. They are also reconnecting with their parents who have passed, as well as accessing services from two Aboriginal community organisations. This is making them feel reconnected. Heather has also become part of a diverse community of women, particularly with shared experiences of domestic violence. They've taken a house outside of where their connections are, but this has been a choice without coercion. They see an advantage in an opportunity to get away to heal, and they intend to return in the future.

Principle Two

Support has been flexible — Heather has been consulted before her caseworker supported Sam in their capacity as a couple, and care has been taken to ensure that Sam feels fully supported as a client. The relationship has been built from the heart; Kay cares deeply about both Heather and Sam, and values them as people. Rather than acting as a 'rescuer', which would be patronising, she is cracking open the door for Heather and Sam to hope, dream and work towards a better future; rather than demonising Sam for domestic violence, Kay recognises the impacts of trauma and has taken a harm minimisation approach — encouraging Sam to overcome and become a role model. Kay has made it clear that now that they are housed, the journey is not over; they will continue to walk together towards the future.

Principle Three:

Heather is supported by an ecosystem of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations; her choice to continue in a relationship where domestic violence is present is respected, and she has been given the choice about whether her husband would be supported by the same caseworker. Support is person-centred, tailored to the individuals and their hopes and dreams.

Principle Four

Kay is respectful, makes it clear at the outset that she won't make false promises, and doesn't blame or shame.

Principle Five

Reconnecting with their oldest daughter, finding hope again, and visiting their parents' graves are all examples of strengthening *wirrin*. Heather and Sam are supported to discover their strengths.

Principle Six

Heather has independently built relationships and found communities, and in her new home they will both be supported and well-informed about opportunities for social, cultural and community inclusion.

* Names changed to protect identities

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Housing is Critical to End Homelessness

Dr Johanna Mitchell, Shelter WA

Homelessness is a complex issue. As outlined by Kaleveld et al, individual risk factors and life experiences such as trauma, mental health, substance misuse, unemployment, disability, incarceration and family breakdown can pre-dispose people to the risk of homelessness. A range of socio-economic factors such as employment opportunities, economic inequality, housing supply and affordability influence the prevalence of homelessness.[1] Western Australia faces growing housing inequity. As house prices continue to rise relative to income, evidence shows a growing disparity between those who own their own home compared to those in the private rental market.[2] For households eligible for social housing, there are long wait times symptomatic of a system under acute pressure. This lack of social housing, coupled with an unaffordable private rental market, is one reason why homelessness persists across Western Australia.

COVID-19 exacerbated and exposed existing issues in the housing market.[3] In the year to September 2021, the median rental price for houses in the Perth metropolitan area increased by 13.9 per cent. Western Australian regional centres saw similar increases, with median rental prices rising by 14.3 per cent in Kalgoorlie, 15.2 per cent in Bunbury, and by 36.4 per cent in Broome.[4] These increases were fueled by record low private rental vacancy rates which were partly driven by numerous years of relatively low investor activity in the housing Western Australian housing market limiting the supply of rental properties and well as interstate migration as a result of the pandemic.[5] The combination of these issues disproportionately impacted those at the lower end of the housing market who do not have the capacity to pay more for their housing, further marginalising households already disadvantaged in the private rental market. A boom in house prices was an unexpected feature of the pandemic across Australia, including in Western Australia, aided by federal and state stimulus packages that targeted investment into renovations and new housing construction.

COVID-19 revealed that State and Federal governments have the capacity to intervene rapidly and meaningfully to influence housing outcomes. In 2020, the Federal Government introduced a Coronavirus Supplement, which increased JobSeeker payments for thousands of Australians. Feedback from homelessness services suggests that this enabled people to pay their rent, pay off debt and to meet basic everyday needs. The WA State Government, similar to other jurisdictions, introduced a moratorium on evictions and rent increases in response to COVID-19. These two measures combined to provide housing security to many Western Australians through the initial stages of the pandemic. Homelessness services across the state raised the alarm well in advance of the moratorium lifting, worried about the impact on homelessness of the moratorium's end along with the winding back of JobSeeker payments at the end of March 2021.

Shelter WA in partnership with government, industry and community services, collaborated to understand the impact of the rental moratorium ending and to develop solutions to assist people experiencing hardship as a result. Data from Circle Green, who provide a tenancy support service, showed the rising demand for housing and tenancy support in response to increases in rent and evictions (Figure 1). Homelessness services across the board saw a significant increase in families and individuals seeking assistance, including family and domestic violence referrals and requests for housing, support and emergency relief. The Financial Counsellors Network reported for the month of April to May 2021

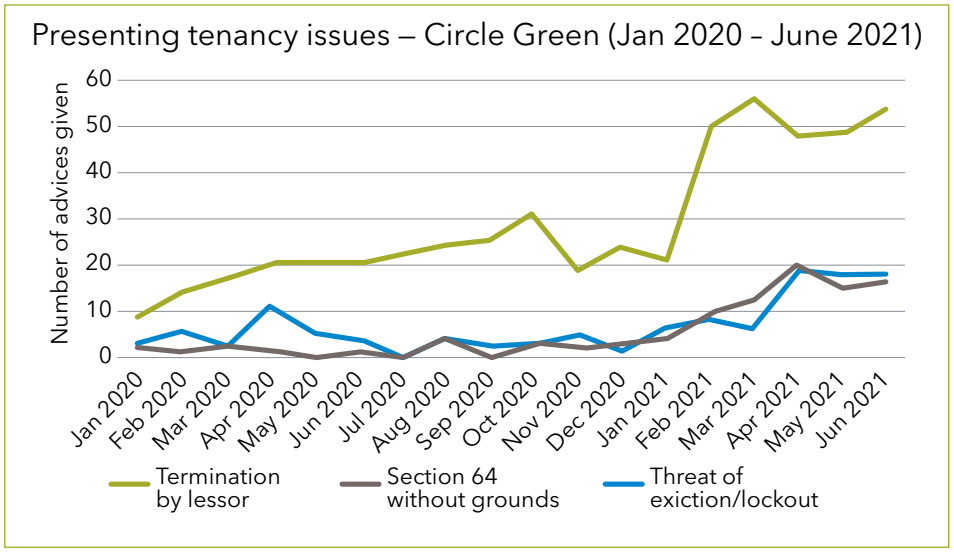

Figure 1: Presenting issues.

Source. Circle Green, 2021

a 122 per cent increase in clients presenting impacted by family and domestic violence and a 600 per cent increase in referrals to family and domestic violence services. Some service providers were spending an additional 15 to 20 per cent of emergency relief funding usually used to help with food and essential services on supporting people with rent arrears. The lack of housing options led to an increase in homelessness with people living with families and friends, in hotels and motels, their cars or on the streets. Services became overloaded with increased demand. This took a huge toll on people in dire need of housing support and assistance. The toll on staff, who were unable to provide assistance to people in need, was significant. The focus on keeping people in their homes to prevent homelessness, and to ensure people had a home through immediate investment into good interim housing options and rapid social and affordable housing solutions was paramount, but difficult as housing options ran out.

Pressures on the housing system continued throughout 2021. Rental vacancy rates remained low at or below one per cent across metropolitan Perth as well as in many regions, especially in the Great Southern and South-West (Figure 2). The Real Estate Institute of Western Australia (REIWA) describes a 'balanced' rental market as having a vacancy rate of between 2.5 and 3.5 per cent. They note that the rate in Perth has only dropped below 1 per cent three times in 40 years.[6]

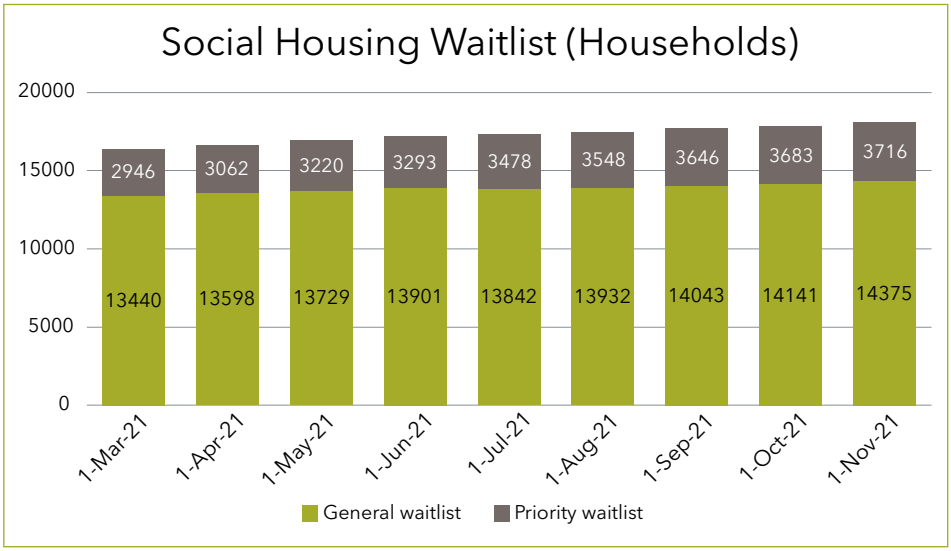

Figure 3: Social housing waitlist, WA.

Source: Various — parliamentary question time and media reports

During this period, the social housing waitlist continued to grow including a significant increase in priority applicants (Figure 3). As of 30 November 2021, the waitlist tipped over 18,000 households, or 31,547 people.[7] This represented an increase of 4,214 households since December 2019 and a doubling of priority applicants since that time.[8]

Western Australia has a chronic lack of social and affordable homes to meet current and growing demand. Social housing comprises only 3.8 per cent of Western Australia's dwelling stock, which has dropped from 4.1 per cent since 2015, and much of this housing is more than twenty years old.[9] Between 2016 and 2021 there was a net loss of 1,426 social dwellings, including a stock decline of 271 dwellings in the 2020–21 financial year, despite new social homes being added to the system.[10]

The WA State Government committed $875 million to social housing in the 2020–21 budget, which brings total investment to $2.1 billion to deliver around 3,300 homes over the next four years. This injection of funding is critical, reversing years of under investment by successive governments. Importantly, this new investment contains short-term responses such as spot purchasing, retention of homes built for sale and utilising modular construction and 'lazy' government land to rapidly deliver homes whilst planning for pipelines of work through budget appropriations in the out-years. However, in delivering this housing package, the State Government is facing the dual challenges of managing an ageing social housing asset portfolio and developing new supply in an overheated construction market, with the market experiencing labour and material shortages, and inflated costs and delivery timelines.

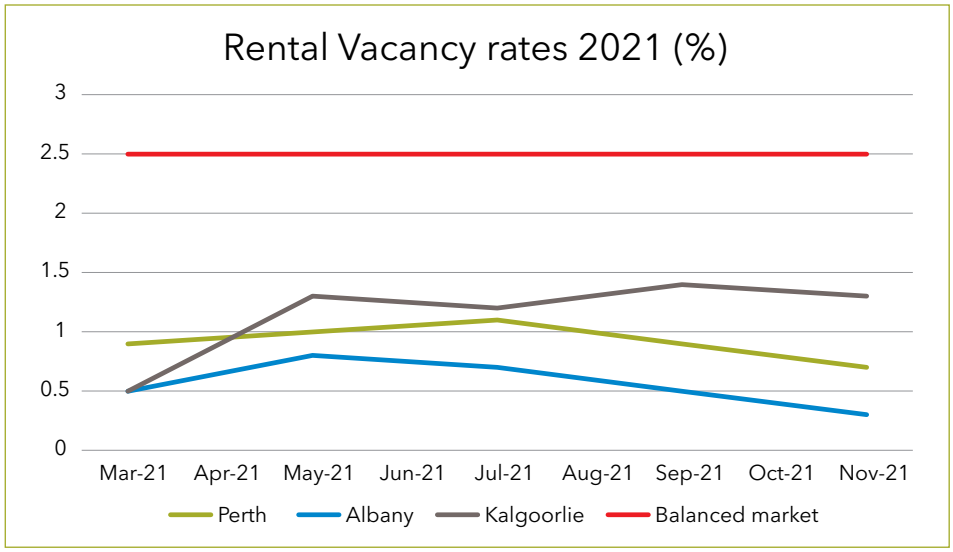

Figure 2: Rental vacancy rates 2021.

Source: REIWA

Western Australia is set to open its borders on February 5, 2022, after two years of relative isolation. While the influx of skilled workers may help ease pressures on the construction industry, including the delivery of social housing, it will also increase pressure on an already strained housing system. Some rental pressure may be eased in 2022 as a result of private investors coming back to the market and as dwellings commenced as a result of the housing stimulus are completed. For example, the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre estimated that 10,000 first home buyers would transition out of the rental market in the 2021–2022

financial year.[11] There are ongoing concerns, however, how the state will accommodate predicted increases in its population as the year progresses.

As we enter the next phase of this pandemic in 2022 with new pressures facing the housing system, it is time to embed a long term, sustainable approach to social and affordable housing investment to meet current and future demand.

International applications of homeless cluster methodology show that in a population of people experiencing homelessness, approximately 80 per cent of this population experience transitional homelessness, five per cent episodic homelessness and 15 per cent chronic homelessness.[12] The provision of crisis accommodation and permanent supported housing options along with a Housing First approach is critical for people experiencing homelessness. For those experiencing transitional homelessness, the swift provision of a home with light touch support as required so people can stabilise and get on with their lives with minimal disruption is critical. While it might be a long bow to say 80 per cent of homelessness could end right now with the provision of social and affordable housing, what can be drawn from this evidence is that housing is critical to end homelessness in all its forms.

The current WA Housing Strategy 2020–2030 targets a six per cent net increase in social housing by 2030. The draft 20-year WA Infrastructure Strategy notes the inadequacy of this figure and the need to better align housing targets with current and projected demand. Research by the University of New South Wales identified an unmet need of 39,200 social and 19,300 affordable homes across Western Australia in 2019. If we continue on the current trajectory, it has been estimated that by 2036 Western Australia will have a shortage of 86,400 social homes and 32,000 affordable homes.[13]

A key step for the Federal and State Government is to establish permanent, sustained and adequate funding mechanisms for the construction and ongoing maintenance of social and affordable homes as has been suggested by National Shelter and the Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA). A social housing investment fund must be a permanent pool of money that creates a pipeline of social housing supply and that leads to a net increase of stock in line with demand. Research also suggests that good practice investment would operate counter-cyclically[14] and would harness the strengths of the community housing sector as a key delivery partner to leverage government investment. Also have an eye to good design and the climate, minimising the cost of running a home. In Western Australia's resource-driven economy, this approach would provide some stability in a fluctuating building and construction market.

Increasing the supply of diverse social and affordable housing will make Western Australia more resilient to future economic shocks and ensure a robust safety net is established for those who need it. This is a key plank in the fight to end homelessness in Western Australia.

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Western Australia's Advance to Zero: Using Collective Impact and Housing First to End Homelessness for People Rough Sleeping and Chronically Homeless

Michala McMahon, Zero Project WA and Cate Pattison, Ruah Community Services

Preamble

50 Lives 50 Homes was Western Australia's (WA) first Housing First initiative. In its three and a half years, the project supported over 350 individuals, housed more than 230 people and fostered a collaborative collective impact partnership of more than 40 government and non-government agencies and specialist homelessness services. Building on this success, in 2020 WA stakeholders committed to bringing the Advance to Zero methodology to WA through the *Zero Project — Housing First Coordination WA*. The Zero Project WA project scales up the original aims of *50 Lives 50 Homes* with some important nuances and differences. This article charts the evolution of Housing First's progress in WA to date, through *50 Lives 50 Homes* and the development of the Zero Project. It will outline the place-based adaption of the Advance to Zero project methodology in WA, successes, and challenges and how the project aims to ultimately achieve functional zero.

Introduction

Western Australia (WA) is a big place. Although a smaller Australian capital city, the 2.1 million population of Greater Perth is stretched across a coast-hugging metropolitan footprint more than 100 kilometres in length. WA 'Sandgropers' can be keen to boast the 'fantastic lifestyle' enjoyed in the state, even though some 9,000 of its people are homeless. In the WA outback (North), the rate of people accessing specialist homelessness services in 2020 was the highest in the country.[1] People are sleeping rough not only in Perth's central business district, but right across the sprawling metropolitan area, from Rockingham in the south through to Joondalup in the North and everywhere in between. Life is clearly not so sunny for all.

Background on Zero

Emerging in the United States in 2010, the Built for Zero movement centred on the concept of creating a continually evolving system that works to count down and sustain a 'functional zero' number of people homeless within a population, rather than a record of those that have been housed. It is a nuanced but fundamentally different approach: a commitment to being accountable to an outcome, a system of learning that continuously feeds information back on the success of strategies, initiative efficacy and failures. Built for Zero's success in America is impressive, with nine communities sustaining functional zero for at least a year. If that could be achieved in the Californian city of Bakersfield, with some of the highest crime rates in America, why not Perth?

In Australia, the Advance to Zero methodology has since been embraced by a national collection of communities and organisations (the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness) committed to the approach. In April 2018 hundreds of people took to the streets in Perth to march together at the 'Love Never Failed Us Yet' community event, the music of Gavin Bryars performed by the University of Western Australia Conservatorium of Music and others as the WA Alliance to End Homelessness' (WAAEH) *Western Australian Strategy to End Homelessness* was launched. This stakeholder-led collaborative strategy has set the framework in WA advocating for more housing and a focus on prevention, sector collaboration and coordination. A year later in 2019, the Western Australian government launched *All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030*, building on this strategy and formally expressing commitment to a Housing First approach.[2]

Wadgee Mia [No Home] 1 by Anthea Corbett. This artwork is about a strong and healthy family unit and trouble free. Anthea is a Yamatji and Wajarri Noongah/Yuet woman who was housed by the 50 Lives project in 2016 after experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping for many years.

50 Lives to Zero

It was however four years prior to the release of this state government strategy that a major Housing First collaborative project was launched in WA, which would go on to deliver the sort of local evidence any commitment to Advance to Zero would require. In 2015 Ruah Community Services launched the *50 Lives 50 Homes* project (50 Lives), a three-year collaborative impact response supporting Perth's most vulnerable rough sleepers to access housing and wrap-around support. The project was funded by the Sisters of St John of God, WA Primary Health Alliance and other community service organisations; and then evaluated by the Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia.[3]

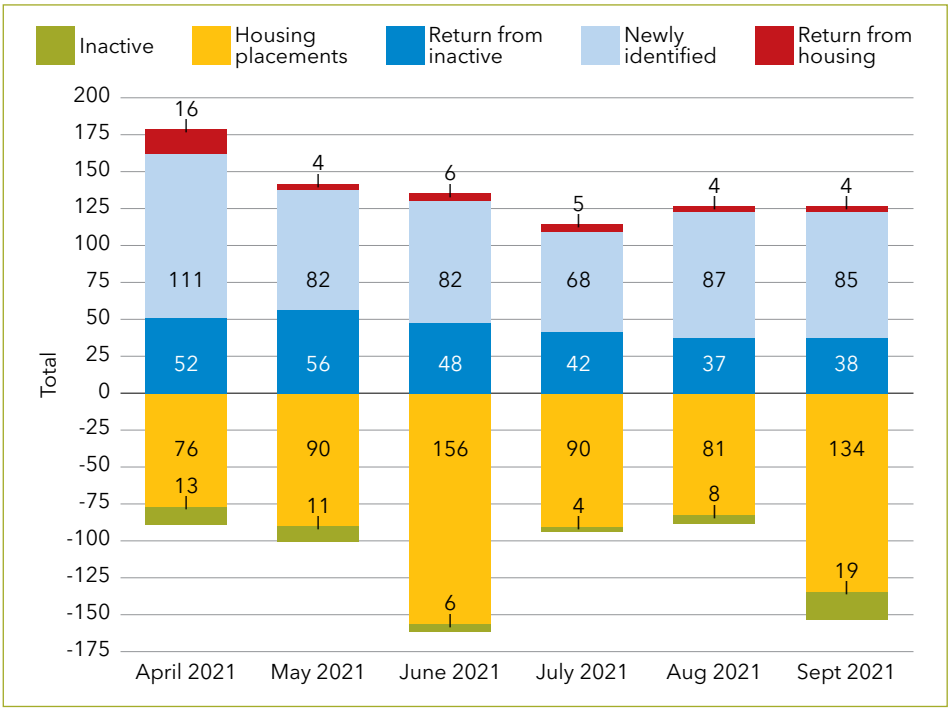
Ruah provided the 'backbone support', facilitating sector collaboration through working groups, information sharing, shared measurement and access to an After Hours Support Service. The community services sector in WA embraced 50 Lives, with 27 organisations participating in the initiative. By the end of the three-year project not 50, but 237 people who came into contact with the project had been housed, with a retention rate of 92 per cent after one year (compared to 74 per cent for those housed otherwise after one year). In 2019, a place-based extension project was also commissioned in Fremantle, the *20 Lives 20 Homes* project, led by St. Patricks Community Support Centre and funded by philanthropic support.[4]

Alongside the launch of the state strategy, funding of $34.5 million was announced for delivery of the *Housing First Homelessness Initiative* (HFHI), to provide accommodation and wrap-around support to people sleeping rough in Greater Perth and some regional centres.

The design includes:

1. Housing First System Coordinator
2. Housing First Support Services
3. The Finding Home Program
4. Evaluation.[5]

Three components of this initiative have been commissioned to date, with the Finding Home Program yet to be announced. At this time 50 Lives evolved to become the Zero Project WA and was awarded the Housing First System Coordinator role, building on their learning from the last four years. To date, 'Advance to Zero' methodology has been expanded through the Zero Project across the broader Perth metropolitan area, as well as regional centres of Geraldton, Mandurah, Bunbury and Rockingham. Supplementary funding from Lotterywest has allowed the launch and operation of the By-Name-List and Housing First training to the sector. Crucial to the success of the Zero methodology, the By-Name-List is already delivering real-time data designed to drive evidence-based improvements. The project's website (*www.zeroprojectwa.org.au*) includes a monthly dashboard of rough sleeping inflow and outflow, with month-on-month comparative data.



Western Australian BNL Timeline from Inception (Perth, Fremantle and surrounds only)

The second component of the initiative, the delivery of Housing First Support Services has also now been activated and in mid-2021 specialist service providers began delivering the service in Perth, Fremantle, Geraldton and Bunbury and more recently in Rockingham and Mandurah. Additionally, an Aboriginal led Housing First service Moorditj Mia was funded, using Aboriginal-led systems of community, family and kinship, lore and relational systems to facilitate more effective service delivery for Aboriginal people sleeping rough in Perth.[6]

Place-based Problems

The Zero Project team, along with WAAEH and local community members have mutually committed to achieve functional zero rough sleeping by 2025. From experience, they know the challenges will be large, with the COVID 19 pandemic and end of the rental moratorium adding an additional layer of complexity. Some of the challenges identified are:

Housing availability

As of July 2021, 17,320 households are on the social housing waitlist, with an average wait-time of 100 weeks.[7] As Housing First Support Services have been rolled out, a stark and debilitating factor to thwart success is the present severe shortage of permanent social housing. Additionally, the galloping rise in residential property value and rents that has occurred over the last 12 months has put severe pressure on the private rental market for those seeking a way out of homelessness. The sector has welcomed the announcement of a $875 million boost for social housing in the 2021–22 State Budget, but with the *Finding Home Program* component to help provide suitable accommodation options still yet to emerge, model fidelity and ultimately the implementation of Housing First is at risk.

Wadgee Mia [No Home] 2 by Anthea Corbett. This artwork shows the difference through challenges stemming from the difficulties within the lifestyle. The feet walking keeping the Culture connected.

Transitional and crisis housing under pressure

Like a tube of toothpaste, as pressure is placed at one end, the other is bound to explode. With such limited housing availability, people are trapped in transitional and crisis housing, now under greater stress. These facilities are not designed to be long-term housing options and the staircase model and criteria of transitional housing can be challenging for some people coming out of chronic homelessness, given the complexities of their trauma.

Shortage of workers

Beyond the lack of physical housing assets a shortage of qualified experienced workers to realise the objectives of Housing First, particularly the wraparound supports necessary to help people transition into long-term housing, is becoming an urgent and worrying concern. Prolonged border restrictions (due to COVID-19) in WA have impacted the inflow of new people entering the state, with the current workforce left to support people on the streets for an extended period, causing fatigue and frustration within the sector.

Success Factor

Against the odds, the Zero Project WA is now establishing solid foundations that can support the sector to reach its goal of functional zero. Incremental improvements to the By-Name-List, as more stakeholders become engaged with the tool, are contributing to the creation of a robust and coordinated measure of people by name who are sleeping rough and chronically homeless. With data derived via the use of the VI-SPDAT, information added to the list can indicate overall risk, wellbeing details and housing and tenancy and socialisation needs, enabling the triage of people to appropriate interventions. Place based Collaborative Homeless Action Groups gather agencies to focus on collective impact to support people who are rough sleeping and chronically homeless whilst Improvement Teams focus on the data and strategic initiatives to reach functional zero.

Bringing different organisations together and asking them to work differently has its challenges; however, alongside access to housing, it is one of the key factors in reaching functional zero. No one organisation can end homelessness.

However, WA is already experiencing some fantastic results for people through Zero Project WA's collective impact. Through this coordinated approach, an Advance to Zero can be clearly on Western Australia's horizon.

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20 Lives 20 Homes: A Place-based Iteration of the Housing First Model

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Background

The *20 Lives 20 Homes* (20 Lives) program is a local place-based response to homelessness based in Fremantle. Fremantle is a key urban centre serving the south metropolitan region approximately 20 kilometres from Perth, Western Australia (WA), and comprises the principal port for Perth.

Established in Fremantle with the generous support of philanthropic donations and some state government support, LotteryWest have now been solely funding the program since January 2021. 20 Lives is a collaborative impact project, and builds off the *50 Lives 50 Homes* Housing First program[1] that operated in Perth from late 2015 to late 2020, and now morphed into the Advance to Zero Project in WA.

20 Lives commenced as a pilot in November 2019, with the initial aim, as its name implies, to support and find housing for 20 of the most vulnerable street present people in Fremantle, as identified by the Vulnerability Index-Service Decision Assistance Tool, VI-SPDAT.[2] At its core are two highly experienced outreach case workers who are based with St Patrick's Community Support Centre (St Pat's), a key organisation in the WA homelessness sector located in the heart of Fremantle. In the pilot, RUAH Community Support Services coordinated the backbone response for 20 Lives and the provision of wrap around after hours support through the After Hours Support Service (AHSS). Foundation Housing was also involved in the pilot, trialling a private rental brokerage initiative that was funded by the WA Department of Communities, in response to the shortage of social housing and affordable rentals in the Fremantle vicinity.

20 Lives Outreach Case Worker with a client

20 Lives is now in its second year, and St Pat's is providing the backbone support as well as the outreach work and case management. As a collective impact initiative, connecting people to other supports and existing services is an important aspect of 20 Lives, and here the place-based ethos is evident, with the 20 Lives program developing cooperative relationships and referral pathways with other Fremantle and south metropolitan health and social support organisations.

The 20 Lives Model

Housing First principles drive the aims of 20 Lives, prescribing safe and permanent housing as a priority, provided prior to, and not conditional upon, addressing other health and well-being issues.[3] Other elements of support provided by 20 Lives include intensive case management, assistance with housing and personal ID document applications and practical household items as well as connecting people to health, mental health and financial services.

With aspirational organisational aims:

i. to broker and sustainably house 20 of the most vulnerable street present homeless people in Fremantle, into long-term housing

ii. to remove barriers to successful long-term housing through a person-centred and trauma informed approach

iii. to work with the individuals to put in place the wrap-around services required for their success.

20 Lives has shown that through their model they have been able to deliver and go beyond those aims.[4]

20 Lives client Martin after being housed

Despite the limitations of available affordable housing in the Fremantle and greater metropolitan area of Perth over the last five to seven years,[5] and rental vacancy rates sitting below one per cent,[6] 20 Lives has successfully achieved their goals, with 27 people being supported as at 1 November 2021.

Figure 1: Who has 20 Lives Supported? (as at 1 November 2021)
27 people
59 per cent MALE 41 per cent FEMALE
44 YEARS AVERAGE AGE (range 23 to 63)
6 YEARS ON AVERAGE SPENT HOMELESS Equivalent to 59,708 nights collectively sleeping rough (at time of undertaking the VI-SPDAT²)

20 Lives Outcomes

From a Housing First[7] perspective, preferred housing is long term, either through low-cost social housing or private affordable rental. The shortfall of housing has meant other options have needed to be sourced, a wider mix of accommodation types, including some people opting for long-term lodging by choice has been implemented. With the importance of choice embedded in the Housing First model,[8] 20 Lives has supported people to access a range of housing options, there has also been some movement between different types of accommodation. Figure 2 describes how the 27 clients of 20 Lives have been housed as at November 2021.

Figure 2: Where are they now? (as at 1 November 2021)
2 people are in social housing lodging
6 people are in private lodgings
3 people are in private rentals through a rental subsidy from St Pat's (1 tenancy and 2 License to Occupy)
2 people housed with Housing Choices Ltd
6 people have reunited with family
1 person has passed away
1 person is incarcerated and no longer in the 20 Lives program
3 people couch surfing — 1 entering into rehab, 1 self-selected to live with family, now priority listed and waiting for long-term housing
5 people are in public housing through the Department of Communities
4 people have received assistance but no longer require support from 20 Lives

20 Lives 20 Homes Case Study

Background

Amy* is an Aboriginal woman who has been sleeping rough in the Fremantle area for approximately seven years. She has a long history of family violence, substantial debt, and has children in care. Amy has sustained substantial bone damage due to physical assault and untreated injuries and struggles with her mental health and substance misuse.

Interventions undertaken by 20 Lives

20 Lives support workers have engaged with Amy over a long period to gain her trust. They assisted her with documentation and housing applications and have supported her to access legal advice and connect with a regular GP. The 20 Lives workers have liaised with Department of Communities regarding housing, complicated due to debt, the 20 Lives workers have supported Amy with a debt discount application.

Amy was finally housed in a two-bedroom private rental in 2020, allowing access to her grandchildren and enabling her to re-establish her relationships with her family. 20 Lives assisted Amy with a Rental Subsidy to support the arrangement financially. 20 Lives brokerage was used to source whitegoods, furniture and vouchers.

Current Situation

There have been no issues with the tenancy — rental payments and tenancy has been well maintained over 12 months. The 20 Lives outreach workers continue to advocate for Amy and she has been priority listed on Department of Communities Housing waitlist. Amy continues to engage in Case Management, the 20 Lives Outreach Workers and with After Hours Support Service ensuring she receives appropriate medical support as well as AOD support.

*Not her real name

In addition to housing needs, and common to people who are sleeping rough,[9] the people supported by 20 Lives often have multiple health, mental health and/or AOD issues. The AHSS has assisted people, newly housed, to cope with these issues, assisting them with illnesses or infections that may have gone untreated for a long period of time. This has been especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a coordinated response, during the lockdown phase and as part of street outreach, 20 Lives assisted all participants in the program to get into some form of accommodation, so they didn't have to sleep rough, while both over the phone and face to face intensive support was provided by the AHSS and the Outreach Case Workers including the St Pat's Doorstep Dinners program.[10] The AHSS also provided home visit support, with measures taken to protect both workers and clients. People were provided with complete and updated information of the risks/impacts of COVID-19 as well as emotional and psychological support.[11]

The case study opposite highlights the terrible circumstances the 20 Lives clients have found themselves prior to engaging in the program and the importance of the wrap around and caring support received by the outreach workers from 20 Lives.

Conclusion

The 20 Lives program has been WA's first localised place-based adaption of Housing First and was highlighted in the WA Department of Communities 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness as an innovative example of a place-based adaptation of the Housing First model in WA.[12] There are now other localised Housing First initiatives in a number of other areas of WA.

Whilst adhering to Housing First principles, the 20 Lives program has had to be flexible in its approach to housing options and has continued to support a number of its participants through transitions from one type of accommodation to another. This is salient to note as it reflects that the notion of a single 'forever home' is often not feasible for a raft of reasons, but what is critical to 20 Lives, and Housing First is that people are supported if they need to move to alternate accommodation, or if they return episodically to homelessness. Too often, homelessness and tenancy support services are funded only to support people for a time limited period (for example 12 months), but as seen over the course of 20 Lives, the availability of ongoing wrap around support that is responsive to each individual's recovery journey is crucial, and life changing. The shortage of social housing and affordable rentals remains a challenge for the 20 Lives program and for the homelessness sector in WA more broadly.

20 Lives client Susan after being housed

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Entrypoint Perth Assessment and Referral Service

Kate Ihanimo, Executive Manager, Centrecare Inc.

Introduction

Adequate housing and a place to call home is essential for all Australians to live with dignity. It is of particular significance for children, who without secure and appropriate accommodation are less likely to thrive and reach their full potential. Over the last year Centrecare has seen an increase in families seeking support due to experiencing or being at imminent risk of homelessness. We are hearing stories of desperation; families with children sleeping in cars, tents, or in open areas without shelter. These families are not thriving. They are struggling every day to survive.

Entrypoint Perth is one of many services in Western Australia (WA) experiencing an increase in requests for support from families, and an increase in the complexities faced by those seeking help.

Centrecare Incorporated is contracted by the Department of Communities to deliver Entrypoint Perth, an assessment and referral service for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness. The service originated as a result of families presenting to the then Department of Child Protection and Family Support (CPFS) district offices for assistance due to homelessness, but not experiencing any other child protection issues. The Department contracted the service to provide a central place for the needs of people experiencing homelessness to be assessed and for clients to be referred into existing support services and accommodation providers. The service is available to individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including individuals aged over 15 years, families, couples without children, and women who are homeless as a result of family and domestic violence. People can self-refer or be referred by the Department of Communities.

When the service commenced in 2014, it serviced the Perth metropolitan area. In 2017, it merged with the Homeless Advisory Service to provide a state-wide information service in additional to the assessment and referral service in Perth. Since then, the Perth metropolitan region expanded to include the Mandurah district, and the Department of Communities' Crisis Care Unit introduced a phone triage system that directly transfers callers seeking support for homelessness to Entrypoint Perth. Each of these changes has resulted in increased demand on the service.

Entrypoint operates six days per week, including Saturdays and weekday evenings to 7pm. A small team is rostered to cover these extended hours, with two Assessment and Referral Officers covering each shift, with the support of a Team Leader. The work is fast paced with a high turnover of clients and other service providers seeking support and information on accommodation options, referral to support services, support to exit violent situations, and access to immediate crisis accommodation. Staff predominantly have a social work or psychology background and are experienced in completing high-risk assessments, managing callers with suicidal ideation, and responding to clients actively experiencing incidents of domestic violence.

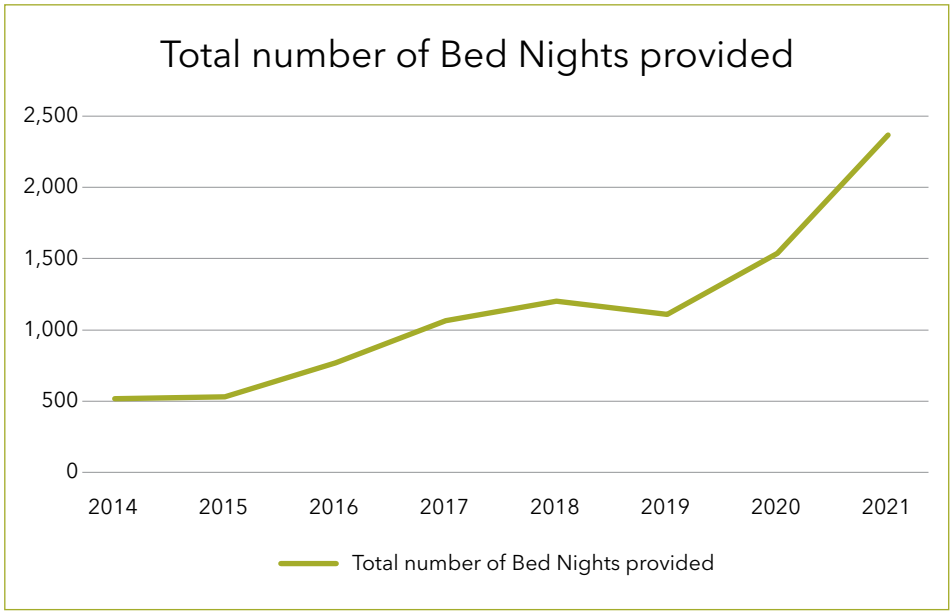
Entrypoint Perth staff

Despite the small team, Entrypoint has been responsive to identified need within the community when required. This has included participating in collaborative approaches to delivering outreach assessment and referral services to local drop-in centres accessed by people experiencing homelessness, and the closing down of accommodation providers where families have been required to exit.

A significant number of women and children access Entrypoint Perth due to experiences of family and domestic violence. Staff are trained in the Common Risk Assessment and Risk Management Framework and are experienced in using the risk assessment tool. Entrypoint has access to the Department of Communities' Bed Count database, maintains strong relationships with women's refuges and actively participates within the refuge service system's integrated response to women and children at imminent risk of harm who cannot otherwise access refuge accommodation, including providing direct referral to lead agency refuges.

While a strong focus remains on families, young people and women experiencing violence, Entrypoint also provides significant support to single adults and rough sleepers, and is often the first point of call for people new to homelessness with limited knowledge of the service system. Entrypoint is actively involved in the Advance to Zero initiative, aimed at ending street homelessness in WA communities. The team is trained and has access to the By-Name List. Relevant clients are entered onto the list, or information updated, as required and with consent.

Centrecare holds extensive data on homelessness in WA. Since commencing in 2014, Entrypoint has provided support to 13,102 distinct clients and many thousands of third parties, including family members, friends, government departments, and service providers. Women have accessed Entrypoint Perth in great numbers than other genders, with 67 per cent of clients being women. Thirty-two per cent of clients identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



A significant proportion of people requesting assistance have dependent children in their care. This has increased considerably in 2021. From 2014 through to 2017, the number of clients seeking support with children in their care increased exponentially. This trend slowed slightly from 2018 through to 2020 but maintained an average of 50 per cent of clients accessing the service having dependent children in their care. Unprecedented numbers of families with children have requested support from Entrypoint Perth in 2021. From the beginning of the year to mid-November, 1,429 support periods have been recorded for a single parent or couple with children in their care. This has equated to 69 per cent of support periods. As a result, Entrypoint's use of brokerage funds to purchase crisis accommodation for families with children in their care and no immediate housing options that night has drastically increased this year.

Prior to 2019, experiences of family and domestic violence were the most commonly reported reason that clients of the service were homeless. With the tightening private rental market in Perth, since 2019 clients seeking support from Entrypoint have most commonly reported their reason for homelessness as being an eviction from private rental.

This year Entrypoint has seen an increase in demand and complexities of families contacting the service, as well as a newly emerging cohort of people at risk of homelessness for the first time as a result of COVID-19 induced rental market changes. In the first half of 2021, Entrypoint Perth experienced an 83 per cent increase in online requests for support compared to the previous six months, totaling 1,183 online enquires. This was in addition to 7,277 phone calls that were answered and 4,369 voice messages that were responded to during this time.

In response to the increase in families seeking support and the new cohort of clients at risk of homelessness, Centrecare applied to Lotterywest for a grant to pilot a service for 18-months, providing brief intervention case management supports to targeted clients of Entrypoint Perth to

Entrypoint Perth staff

support them to retain their at-risk housing, secure new housing options, or decrease barriers to accessing housing. The service, known as Entrypoint Outreach, accepts referrals for Entrypoint clients in the Perth metropolitan area experiencing or at risk of homelessness, who are assessed as being likely to benefit from brief intervention supports, including:

- private tenants facing termination who have previously maintained housing without accessing the homelessness service system
- families with dependent children in their care
- women, with or without children, experiencing domestic violence, particularly those in temporary purchased accommodation awaiting a women's refuge vacancy.

Entrypoint Outreach works closely with the Entrypoint Perth team to enhance the outcomes of clients. The pilot does not work with rough sleepers to avoid duplicating the services currently targeted towards this vulnerable cohort. Entrypoint Outreach's focus is on diverting people away from the homelessness sector, decreasing barriers for families experiencing homelessness, and providing timely support to women experiencing violence who are being temporarily accommodated while waiting for a refuge accommodation vacancy. The interventions are intensive but brief, over a two-to-six-week period.

Centrecare is partnering with the University of Western Australia's Centre for Social Impact research team to provide an independent evaluation of Entrypoint Outreach. The research will evaluate the pilot's effectiveness in supporting clients to achieve improved housing stability and safety through a number of short-term outcomes.

The complexities facing people experiencing and at risk of homelessness in WA are diverse. Ending homelessness requires an equally diverse range of services to capture the needs of all.

Entrypoint Perth staff

Below are some short case studies that capture some of the outcomes that can be achieved with brief intervention support. All names have been changed.

John contacted Entrypoint seeking accommodation for himself, his wife, and their adult children who resided in the family home. All family members were living with disability. They had resided in the same private rental property for over a decade but had received a Notice of Termination and were now facing imminent eviction. John was overwhelmed with the circumstances and unable to advocate for himself to secure another tenancy. The family was facing homelessness with no options or support networks. Over a number of days, Entrypoint Perth were able to work closely with John and advocate heavily with the real estate agent. As a result, an alternative rental property was found with the same agent and a new tenancy agreement was signed, preventing the family from entering homelessness.*

Mary contacted Entrypoint seeking accommodation for herself and her partner. Mary was a carer for her partner and their tenancy was due to expire within a month. They were not offered a renewal as the owners wanted to sell the property. Mary was supported by Entrypoint Outreach, who were able to negotiate a 12-month lease extension for Mary and her partner to stay in the property.*

Glenda, her partner and three children were living in a tent in her parents' backyard after not having their tenancy of four years renewed due to the owner's wanting to sell. Glenda had been unsuccessful in finding an alternative rental. Entrypoint Outreach workers upskilled Glenda in how to find and apply for a property, liaised with the real estate agent, and supported Glenda in an application. Glenda was successful in obtaining the rental and the family are now housed and diverted away from the homelessness sector.*

Anna contacted Entrypoint seeking safe accommodation for herself and her three young children. She disclosed experiencing a violent incident from her husband the night before. Due to her limited English skills, Anna had not been able to explain the extent of the incident to police when they attended the property. Entrypoint Perth assessed Anna's needs and risk with the support of an interpreter. Through a risk assessment, Anna disclosed that her husband had threatened her and allegedly attempted to kill her and the children. Due to her level of fear and imminent safety risk, Entrypoint completed a high-risk referral to the local women's refuge lead agency to secure immediate refuge accommodation. With Anna's consent Entrypoint reported her disclosure to the refuge, police, and Crisis Care Unit to support her to receive adequate assistance.*

Tiny Houses Bunbury: A Community Collaboration Responding to Homelessness

Evan Nunn, Chief Executive Officer, Accordwest

Conversation Leads to Change

When everyone deserves a safe place to call home, what steps can a community take to propel positive action? Homelessness continues to be an ever-increasing social concern across Australia and it is our collective responsibility to find solutions to deliver safe and stable housing.

In Bunbury, Western Australia (WA) the local community's shared desire to fight homelessness head-on has launched this conversation spurring it into action. Through the combined effort of social services provider Accordwest, community groups and community leaders, the city stepped up to the plate to answer the call for active innovation in social housing, embarking on a WA-first project: The Tiny Houses Initiative.

Delivering Better Outcomes for West Australians

Demand for more crisis housing, transitional housing, supported housing and social housing continues to increase across the state. In fact, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states that two out of three requests for homelessness services went unmet in WA in 2020,[1] while ShelterWA reports the average time spent waiting for social housing in 2021 is 100 weeks.[2] It's time to deliver better outcomes for West Australians. To actively drive these outcomes, the WA Government has released a 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030.[3] The *All Paths Lead to A Home* Strategy is the basis of our community-led Tiny Houses initiative, with this project specifically addressing the vital need for transitional housing within our state.

Innovative Solutions

Worldwide, we're seeing an uptake of a wide range of innovative accommodation solutions to address homelessness; from pod-like living quarters called Ulmer Nests in Germany, to 3D printed houses in India, shipping container homes in the United States and the reimagining of concrete water pipes into homes in Hong Kong. We are also seeing further iterations of the Tiny Houses model in Canada, England and across the UK.[4,5] Our Tiny Houses initiative puts WA on par with this global movement acting as a working model to show what's possible if they are implemented in Western Australia. Across the country, mining companies are already utilising a similar tiny house model to accommodate FIFO workers. Our Tiny Houses innovatively repurpose this idea, applying it to those who most need it.

Our Tiny Houses Initiative

Aligning with the WA Government's *All Paths Lead to A Home* Strategy, Tiny Houses are built to be more than a roof over the head. Our community-led project consists of three 30 square metre, self-contained dwellings designed to help single rough sleepers stabilise before they move into more permanent accommodation. Residents are high priority tenants who each have the ability to self-determine their needs but (for whatever reason) are not equipped with the resources to build the life they want to live. Because homelessness deeply impacts a person's mental

and physical health, education, opportunities for employment and overall integration into the community, every tenant receives full wraparound support services. They will work with a dedicated Accordwest Housing Support Worker to secure long-term accommodation, and map out personal goals and actions to regain control of their lives.

Accordwest wraparound services provide a unique combination of supports to each tenant on their pathway to a home. This could look like creating healthier family relationships, pursuing education and skills training, undergoing personal development, working towards community reintegration or accessing service from other organisations (for example, physical and mental health, alcohol and other drugs). No person's journey is the same. The tenant support attached to our Tiny Houses is a reflection of this.

Five Years in the Making

Beyond the essential conversation around an increased delivery of safe, stable housing and associated supports, our Tiny Houses initiative is a conversation starter around successful community partnerships. What initially began as the brainchild of Don Punch MLA, this solution is five years in the making and a model example of how the collaboration between organisations, community and community leaders can launch life-changing positive action.

Tiny Houses are informed by local needs, context and our capacity to deliver appropriate and flexible housing options and services; they are actioned by collaborating with people with lived experience, other community services, businesses, philanthropic bodies and the state government. To champion this, we formed a Tiny Houses Subcommittee led by an outstanding team of visionaries and local community organisations. This included Accordwest, The Salvation Army, Rotary Club of Bunbury and many local businesses and individuals, all driven to create change.

The level of genuine collaboration that came out of this project showed just how much action a community could generate with the resources at hand. Our initial government grant of

$180,000 acted as a launching point, while the community generously provided other essential materials and services to translate the original vision into tangible outcomes. Even more impressive was the ability to turn around the project amidst a global pandemic. In light of the current COVID-19 climate where WA is held in the grip of a housing and rental crisis, the priority was to have these homes servicing the community as soon as possible. Over six months, Challis Builders constructed three modular houses on-site to Class One A conditions designed to last over 50 years, while our other contributors tirelessly attended to every detail from interior design to the surrounding gardens. What resulted was more than we could have imagined and a true reflection of the Bunbury community's compassion.

Tiny Houses with a Big Heart

May 2021 launched our significant community project to the public. Over 100 esteemed guests, dignitaries and media joined us to celebrate the hard work and dedication poured into this initiative by the Bunbury community. To comprehend the extent of the hard work involved, attendees took a guided walk through the Tiny Houses and listened to key contributors speak on their motivations behind the build. We saw a room teeming with excitement for this project which was widely captured in positive national media coverage across print, radio and digital platforms. The undeniable pride radiating from all who attended the launch was inspirational. It says 'We're in it together.' And as a pilot project, it encourages more conversations around applying innovative ideas to help rough sleepers in our community.

Tiny Houses are a big win for all organisations involved and for the Bunbury community. Since the launch, we're now seeing this model explored by other social services organisations within our state. It has also influenced the WA Department of Communities and Housing to include modular builds on the agenda for a share of the State Government's housing grants. The conversation to actively end homelessness has begun and we couldn't be prouder for Tiny Houses to be a big part of it.

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Hard Borders and a Housing Crisis: Lessons Learned from a Government/Non-Government Partnership Response During COVID-19

Isabell Evans, Acting Manager Service Integration and Partnership, Service Strategy, Anglicare Western Australia

Thanks to our State's hard border, Western Australia (WA) has largely avoided the severe physical and mental health impacts and economic toll that COVID-19 has had on other parts of Australia and the world. However, despite recording our biggest ever budget surplus,[1] WA has still been impacted by the significant uncertainty the pandemic has created. We are in the midst of a housing crisis with the worst rental shortage in over a decade.[2] Perth rentals have increased over 16 per cent in the last financial year alone.[3]

Over the past nine months Anglicare WA (AWA) has partnered with the WA Government's Consumer Protection (CP) division in their delivery of Residential Tenancies Mandatory Conciliation Services (RTMCS) and the Residential Rent Relief Grant Scheme (RRRGS). Part of the same Government's COVID-19 relief package, the RTMCS helped landlords and tenants with rental issues during the pandemic's emergency period. The RRRGS supported tenants in pandemic-related financial hardship to maintain their tenancies through rent arrear and future rent payment grants. A government/non-government partnership outside of a standard contracting arrangement, this work provided a unique insight to the State's housing crisis and those navigating it.

By January 2021, 10 months following the RTMCS/RRRGS launch, it was clear that clients needed more than just immediate financial support to maintain their tenancies. We know that financial and housing issues are often the tip of the iceberg when it comes to people's multiple unmet needs*, and it takes a holistic approach to meaningfully walk beside people to successfully navigate these, maintain housing and stabilise financially. While CP were well-positioned to support those in rental stress with conciliation services and financial assistance, by nature of their function they were simply ill-equipped to support people's wider housing, financial, legal and physical and mental wellbeing needs.

AWA is a leading not-for-profit organisation that helps people in times of need, with expertise in tenancy support. Recognising that a pandemic requires community service organisations to go above-and-beyond in their responses to community needs, AWA's Board invested over $2 million to address various COVID-19-related unmet needs. When CP reached out seeking support to manage an escalation of social and emotional issues raised by clients amid the worsening impact of the housing crisis, the Housing Stability Project (HSP) was born.

Since April 2021, two Housing Support Workers have provided phone-based support to over 185 tenants Statewide, warmly referred from the RTMCS/RRRGS. Support has included immediate financial assistance, information and advice, tenancy advocacy, connection to various place-based supports and a skilled and empathetic ear for people experiencing high anxiety. As the crisis worsened and services were at capacity, the HSP pivoted to a brief case management model, supporting clients for as long as required until place-based support services could step in. With support from our partners; Red Cross, Centrecare and Ruah's tenancy supports, the Financial Counselling Network's emergency relief service and financial counselling, and various community legal services, the HSP has saved tenancies and prevented homelessness.

So, what key things did we learn from this crisis and this Project?

Many people in housing crisis are first-time help-seekers.

CP received an overwhelming amount of contact from tenants and landlords who were experiencing financial and housing stress, eviction and even homelessness for the first time. The proportion of this cohort was far greater than normally seen in government-contracted housing support services. We found these clients to be our most vulnerable, not having the same resilience in adversity and know-how in seeking help as those that sought this from community services more regularly.

Not knowing what supports were available to them, our partners said that without the HSP as a complement to the RTMCS/RRRGS, many people would have fallen through the cracks, only thinking to contact government to receive immediate assistance but continuing to struggle with their tenancies and other unmet needs. This reminded us of two things. First, we must never underestimate the strength and agency of people in seeking out multiple services to access what they need. Second, we must always ask the question: who isn't coming through the door? For many help-seekers, government is their first port of call, and so our relationships with government must be robust.

The system is complex to navigate for those that have experience in doing so, let alone for those that have never accessed services before.

Across Perth and Peel there are over a dozen government-funded organisations supporting people with their tenancies, and several community housing providers. Place-based services are key to strengths-based and sustainable responses, and

each organisation has its own area of expertise underneath the housing umbrella. The fact remains however that the number of organisations is, simply, a lot. It is unreasonable to expect someone facing imminent homelessness to expend mental, emotional and physical energy navigating the service system on their own. A system navigator who can walk behind, beside, or in front of a client is key.

Crucial to the success of a system navigator approach is strong interpersonal relationships between staff across these services. Databases can be of some value, but we must carve out time and space for one-to-one relationship building. As mentioned, key to the HSP's success was an openness to collaborate from the Private Tenancy Support Service at Red Cross, Centrecare and Ruah, and other community-based financial and legal supports. We built a common understanding, a shared goal and a trust in each other's approach, which in turn, translated into client's confidence in their service journey.

Government/non-government partnerships work when we acknowledge and complement our respective strengths.

CP and AWA brought different offerings, but together this holistic model of support provided immediate financial relief, complemented by someone to walk beside a client as they navigated other supports. Government has many touch points with people facing multiple unmet needs, more than our sector often assumes.

As with any impactful partnership, it was important to establish our boundaries as well as what we could each offer, not to mention acknowledging that we often speak a different language. Client-facing staff from communicated daily, but we also took the time to review our progress, reflect on our partnership, and strategise. Coming from a strengths-based lens is crucial in achieving collective impact, whether partners are government, non-government, or both.

People appreciate not having to repeat their story.

HSP referrals contained a level of detail that enabled clients to not have to repeat their story to another new voice over the phone. Clients were experiencing high situational anxiety, which wasn't going to be helped by having to explain that situation time and time again.

Overwhelmingly what clients told us was that they appreciated that the person calling them understood what they were experiencing and had already, some ideas for additional support. Clients provided us with similar feedback when they were connected with place-based housing, financial and legal services as well. We echo the 100 Families project's sentiments, that putting clients in a position where they need to retell their often traumatic story over and over is at a minimum discouraging, and risks compounding existing trauma.[4]

The housing crisis is worsening, and social security isn't a safety net.

Reports citing WA's record housing approvals predict increases in housing availability and affordability next year.[5] This does not mean much though for people forced to choose unsustainable tenancies over medical bills or food in order to keep a roof over their heads, a situation many HSP clients were forced into.

For single people without children receiving JobSeeker, rents over $95 per week put them in housing stress. AWA's recent Rental Affordability Snapshot showed that in March 2021, there was one Perth property affordable for a single person receiving JobKeeper.[6] A November scan of *www.realestate.com.au* showed only 29 properties for rent across the region under $175 per week; all rooms, and 22 of these around Curtin University.

Commentary on the future of WA's housing market is outside this article's scope, but it is clear that inadequate JobSeeker, rent assistance and other related payments are a major contributor to this housing crisis. Alongside social housing, the private rental market consistently fails those on the lowest incomes.

We can still learn a lot from our Covid-19 Housing Stability Project as we move through this crisis, however. That any response must be in partnership with government and acknowledge it as a first port-of-call for many help-seekers. That people benefit from someone walking beside them in navigating an often complex system. That said system must be enabled to be as interconnected as possible so that the experience of those it is created for, our clients, is trauma-informed, seamless and impactful. The Housing Stability Project and RRRGS end on 31 December 2021, but we know that it has facilitated incredible impact, and the partnerships forged will lay the foundations for impact to come.

* At the WA Tenancy Conference lived experience advocate Trish Owen reminded attendees that all humans are complex, and that all humans have unmet needs, but sometimes some of us have multiple unmet needs at the same time. I have chosen to use this terminology henceforth. Thanks for the education, Trish.

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Bringing Housing into Housing First

Leah Watkins, Manager Tenant Engagement and Capacity Building, Housing Choices WA

Jurisdictions across the country are turning to Housing First as best-practice to address chronic homelessness. Community housing providers can play an important part in transforming the system by adding value to this model through provision of a supportive landlord service which aligns with and supports Housing First principles. Supportive landlords can act as a critical circuit breaker between someone staying housed and a return to homelessness.

Most work in Housing First focuses on how support is delivered differently, with housing mainly considered in terms of how quickly people can access it and making sure there is no 'readiness' criteria. Housing First would be richer, however, if housing providers also worked differently. The decisions landlords make and the approach they take to both allocating and managing tenancies can have a significant impact on people's sense of home and the sustainability of housing.

Key Elements of a Supportive Landlord Approach

All community housing providers aim to be supportive as landlords, however a funded supportive landlord approach provides both the resourcing and framework to undertake the level of collaboration and absorb the level of commercial risk needed to fully embrace a Housing First approach.

Some elements of this approach require a shift in government regulation and policy to facilitate a more Housing First approach. The government department responsible for the waitlist system and regulation of community housing providers can enable this by establishing a clear agreement and process to allow:

- *Sensitive letting* as opposed to 'the top of the list' to enable community housing providers to allocate according to highest need and the best possible fit between the person and both the property and community. Sensitive letting enables providers to align with the Housing First principle 'choice and self-determination'[1] and produces much better outcomes for the person and tenancy. The impact of this is evidenced by the 2020 *50 Lives 50 Homes Third Evaluation Report* which found best fit allocations produced an 87 per cent retention rate after three years in comparison to 60 per cent for standard allocation processes.[2]

- *Program swapping* is another tool that can help facilitate choice and get the best fit for the property and community. Historically a wide range of government programs have sought to solve the need for housing for their target group by allocating specific properties and ring-fencing referral rights. The impact of this is often unnecessary vacancies or under-occupancy where the program with referral rights does not have a suitable referral or places a single person in a much larger property because that is all that is available. Larger community housing providers in particular, have the capacity to ensure better allocations and transfers if they were contracted to provide a set number of tenancies per program rather than specific addresses. Program swapping also enables people on supported tenancies to stay in their home and be changed to a general tenancy agreement if they no longer need or want support. The community housing provider can then make an alternative property available to the support program. This ties in with the Housing First principle of 'housing and support are separated'.[3] The Western Australian government have recently been innovative in this space, allowing flexibility of use across programs for inter-agency swapping.

- *Person-centred tenancy management* with higher staffing levels and specialist training. This includes tenancy support planning with the person to work out how as landlords we can actively support the tenancy, adjust our practices to take into account their past experiences, and agree how they want us to work with their support services. It also enables housing provider staff to take part in case conferencing with support providers to ensure our decision-making is informed by joint efforts to sustain the tenancy.

- *Capacity to take higher commercial risks* by having access to a subsidy for complex tenancies housing providers can both undertake small property adaptions (for example, soundproofing or fencing) and absorb some additional costs (for example, tenant liability, transfer costs, rent arears) in order to sustain a tenancy. A supportive landlord is funded so decisions can prioritise individual and personal outcomes over commercial, reputational and compliance risks associated with complex tenancies.

Housing providers also have an important role in delivering on the Housing First principle of 'social and community inclusion'.[4] Landlords

are often familiar with the whole neighbourhood, managing nearby properties and having relationships with neighbours. Tenant engagement and community development is a significant part of the work undertaken by community housing providers. This can vary from mediation to resolve neighbourhood conflict, tenant led groups to share budgeting tips to consultation with tenants to improve how services are delivered.

Evidence-base

In Finland, community housing provider Y-Foundation have been an important player in leading the roll out of Housing First as national approach which resulted in significant reductions long-term homelessness.[5] To achieve this, they have converted or built additional properties and been funded to take on additional supportive tenancy officers. As they rightly observe 'you can't do Housing First unless you do the housing first'.

Locally, a number of community housing providers have developed the supportive landlord model through the Mental Health Commission funded, Independent Living Program (ILP). This complementary housing model has demonstrated the critical role housing providers can play in delivering better outcomes for people who have long histories of failed tenancies. Over the past three years, Housing Choices WA (the largest provider in this program) maintained an eviction rate of less than 0.13 per cent across its entire portfolio, however, the ILP program experienced much lower at less than 0.04 per cent. This demonstrates that the capacity of the supportive landlord model to achieve more sustainable housing outcomes with a much more complex cohort. Further work is required to evidence the social impact across health, mental health, justice, education and child protection of this simple early intervention of not placing people's homes at risk.

The other key outcome area for the ILP program is the impact of the supportive landlord in reconnecting tenants to support. Funding for support services can be time limited both due to the nature of the contract or the service design. As people settle into their homes and stabilise their mental health, over time they may also disengage from support services as they experience periods of wellness or primarily receive support away from their home. The housing provider relationship is long-term and continues throughout the tenancy regardless of the ongoing presence of formal support. For a supportive landlord, the aim is to avoid any return to homelessness — no matter how long the person has been housed and no matter what stage of their mental, social or economic wellness they may be experiencing.

As a housing provider, our tenancy management staff continue to regularly visit people in their homes and can often identify declines in their mental health or increase in other support needs from the way they manage their home, relate to their neighbours and maintain their rent payments. ILP tenancy staff have made referrals back into support

or helped people link to additional resources for 26 per cent of tenancies over the last 18-month sample period. This highlights the critical role community housing providers can play acting as a 'canary in the coalmine' identifying re-emerging support needs and reconnecting people to support services. It enables a supportive landlord to act as a critical window of opportunity to deliver a system aligned to the Housing First principle of 'flexible support as long as needed'.[6]

Supportive Landlord in Practice

So, what does this look like in practice? In standard practice, tenancy officers working in social housing have large portfolios and are likely to only visit properties every six months. In a supportive landlord model, they have a smaller portfolio and are likely to visit more often, liaise with support providers, include family (with consent) in action plans and manager a much higher level of phone calls and contacts from support services, neighbours, strata companies and tenants themselves.

In practice supportive landlord encompasses a wide range of things. Examples include:

- Working with a philanthropic funder to purchase a house large enough for a family of 11 and covering the cost of additional property damage resulting from the number of people in the house and their long history of trauma.
- Working with a woman who has issues with hoarding and setting up an action plan after a standard rental inspection to focus on small areas of the property each time. The tenancy officer supported with additional visits, which were clearly flagged as not inspections, where they would praise.
- Absorbing the cost of additional lock changes for an older man who frequently lost his keys or lent them to people he later didn't want at his home because they threatened him.
- Conducting an internal case conference to make decisions about whether or not to maintain the tenancy of a family who has repeatedly cancelled payments and failed to pay rent. The outcome of this was agreeing to continue the tenancy with an action plan to explore transfer options following a risk assessment which emphasised the cost to the family and to the community of ending the tenancy.
- Working with a tenant's sister (because there were no support services involved) to help arrange transport and support for him to attend meetings to organise a transfer, house him temporarily and move property so he can move away from an area where he was being bullied.
- Buying noise cancelling headphones for the neighbour who is studying and lives next door to a gentleman who drinks and can become noisy. Despite his efforts to make good with apology notes under the door, the neighbour complains regularly. Staff also bought him stoppers for under his furniture to soften the noise.
- Making additional phone calls and text messages to encourage people to take part in community housing organised tenant engagement activities, groups, art programs, etc.

Supportive Landlord and Homelessness

Having successfully used the supportive landlord model to house and retain people with severe and enduring mental health challenges, Housing Choices WA are keen to explore how this model aligns with Housing First and can be adapted for people who have experienced long-term homelessness. In Bunbury, Housing Choices WA is starting a pilot project to deliver a supportive landlord approach and work collaboratively with the local Housing First funded service and other key providers. This pilot is an opportunity to test the model with people who have experienced long-term homelessness and build a solid framework for community housing providers to adapt their practice to Housing First. To date four people have moved into homes (including a mother and son), with another family planning to move in soon.

From this pilot, we can commence the larger work of linking the supportive landlord model to wider social impact and evidence to government the economic benefit of housing providers playing an active role in the Housing First model and keeping people in their homes.

Endnotes

1. See *Housing First Principles for Australia*; *https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Housing-First-Principles.pdf*
2. See *https://www.flipsnack.com/ruahcs/50-lives-50-homes-third-evaluation-report/full-view.html*
3. See *Housing First Principles for Australia*; h*ttps://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Housing-First-Principles.pdf*
4. See *Housing First Principles for Australia*; *https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Housing-First-Principles.pdf*
5. See *A Home of Your Own — Housing First and ending homelessness in Finland* (2017), Y-Foundation; *https://ysaatio.fi/assets/files/2018/01/A_Home_of_Your_Own_lowres_spreads.pdf*
6. See *Housing First Principles for Australia*; *https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Housing-First-Principles.pdf*

Hear of My Experience (HOME)

Michelle Mackenzie, Chief Executive Officer Shelter WA

During Homelessness Week 2021 Shelter WA launched two seminal pieces of work — the Hear of My Experience (HOME) Lived Experience Engagement Framework and Lived Experience Co-Design and Engagement Toolkit, developed through a co-design process with people with lived experience to support their engagement by and with the WA housing and homelessness sector.

The Framework provides information gathered from research, workshops and conversations on how social housing providers and homelessness services can better harness the knowledge and skills of people with lived experience across organisational policies, planning and practice, and why this is important. The Toolkit is a practical resource that shows how this can be done. Access to the Toolkit is through a hands-on workshop run by people with lived experience of housing insecurity and homelessness.

On reflection, this was one of the most challenging and rewarding pieces of work that Shelter WA has undertaken — and before embarking on this work I wish that we had this information to assist us as these projects unfolded.

As a peak body our vision is that all living in Western Australia have housing that enables them to thrive. Our purpose is to work with our members and others where appropriate to provide a strong voice and lead the development of an effective housing system.

Understanding policies that facilitate or hinder great housing outcomes, in particular for people on low incomes, is in our DNA — housing economics, urban planning, taxation and financial settings, tenancy law, housing design, service systems and service design. We research and we engage deeply in developing our policy and advocacy responses. Over many years this engagement has included with people with lived experience of homelessness and housing insecurity.

When the opportunity arose to co-design this work with people with lived experience we jumped at the chance. We had engaged before and the mantra nothing about us without us and the importance of genuine engagement with people with lived experience in our work was important.

So, we contracted a co-design facilitator, established a project advisory group, which included people with lived experience, and developed an EOI for people

Launch of the HOME Framework and Toolkit, Homelessness Week 2021 — Left to right: John Berger, WAAEH: Trish Owen Lived Experience Advocate: Natalie Sangalli, Housing Choices: Deborah Ralph-Kafarela, Lived Experience Advocate; Josh Serafini, Lived Experience Advocate , Allan Connolly, Lived Experience Advocate, Margaret King, City of South Perth, Michelle Mackenzie, Shelter WA; Eugenie Stockmann, Co-operation Housing" Mark Slattery, RUAH

Launch of the HOME Framework and Toolkit, Homelessness Week 2021

with lived experience to work with us. We were thrilled when, through an interview process, we had a diverse group of people to undertake the co-design process. This co-design process involved upskilling participants as needed in co-design and other areas as decided by the group including housing policy, advocacy, media training and public speaking.

On reflection as an organisation, whilst our heart was willing, we were not truly ready to do this work. We thought everything was in place to do the project well including a facilitator, a budget to pay participants for their expertise, peer support workers, building skill development into the project, and a staff person as a touch point to provide support as required.

What we didn't have was the time and space built into the project, or our organisation, to do this work justice. We did not truly understand or anticipate the impact of the work on participants as it unfolded or how trauma would manifest itself in multiple ways. Also, we were not prepared for the deep bonds that would form between participants or the level of care expected and needed of us in particular as the project drew to an end.

As a small organisation there are always competing interests for time and resources. We'd set this as just another project. As more time was spent by staff responding to participant inquiries, reviewing the budget and needing to reschedule meetings, there were impacts on staff in terms of workload and stress. We had not fully anticipated the resourcing needs of the project at the outset. The difficulties that emerged were Shelter WAs, not the participants, due to our lack of organisational readiness.

What was incredible is the generosity of the HOME participants in not giving up on this project or Shelter WA. As Homer Simpson said, Trying is the first step towards failure… and whilst as the project unfolded it sometimes felt like this, Homer was proved wrong! Shelter WA is stronger for diving in and doing this work, and staying the course when things got tough. And ultimately, we hope that, through these resources, the sector will become stronger by having the Toolkit and Framework to support them to not only understand the benefits of co-designing with lived experience experts, but importantly, how to undertake this with integrity and confidence.

These resources were deeply informed and co-designed by a wonderful group of people with lived experience of housing insecurity and homelessness. Through their hard-won knowledge, their willingness to work through challenges and their generosity, they have given so much to Shelter WA and the sector. I hope that these resources can assist you and your organisation with your work.

HOME Lived Experience Engagement Framework Link to framework: *https://www.shelterwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ShelterWA-Hear-of-My-Experience-FRAMEWORK.pdf*

HOME Lived Experience Co-Design and Engagement Toolkit and Workshop Information: *http://www.shelterwa.org.au/home-kit-workshop/*

Lived Experience (1)

Jonathan Shapiera, West Australian Council of Lived Experience*

Talking about homelessness from the perspective of one who has been there, is not easy. Reliving all those traumatic past instances of being on the street is an emotional drain. Then consider that I was a single father with a teenage son for the term of our homelessness is something that bites hard. It hurts and seven years later, still hurts, emotionally and financially.

It started for us in Darwin. I had been chasing cash flow for a few years trying to make ends meet as best I could for my son and me. My divorce cleaned me out financially and then the next one took what was left. I got custody of my son through the courts after discovering my ex-wife was beating him up. Something that still haunts him today.

I went contracting as an IT Project Manager up and down the east coast until we got to Darwin. That's where everything went wrong. I was earning $120 per hour so paying $550 rent for a small house in the southern districts was not hard. It was when I lost a contract because I finished ahead of time that everything fell apart. I gave up the house, moved all the furniture into storage and my son and I moved into the car. That's when I came to understand the word homeless. My son was 16.

Over the next few weeks, I did what I could to keep my sanity as the last thing I wanted to happen was to seriously loose it in front of Nik while trying to sleep. The heat and humidity were unbearable, and the mosquitoes were a pain in the arse. Food was whatever we could afford at the local shopping centre. I was partial to Japanese as it was tasty and seemed to be good enough as dietary adequate.

One early afternoon we were driving down the main street of Darwin and Nik said, *'my life is a load of shit'* and then tried to dive out the passenger window. I remember having one hand on the wheel and one on his trouser belt with half his body hanging out the passenger window. This was the first of four attempts at suicide. This is a word that I came to know only too well during our near three years living in the car. It is a word that graces the streets of those homeless in Darwin and Perth where we settled a few months later. There was absolutely bugger all support for us in Darwin and we spent some 18 months there living in our car.

We made the way south simply because suicide was like a dose of flu. One person got the inkling and spoke to another and then another and then the papers stated that there were some 36 youth suicides in the NT during 2013. I got out to stop 37.

We arrived in Perth late 2013 and spent another Christmas wrapped up in the car. We graced the beaches of Rockingham and a car park area that had many others who were homeless spending a night or two. The long-termers became friends, and we formed a community. Old Mort was an indigenous fella who had trouble with his diabetes. We tagged as mates as I was a diabetic as well. He lost a few toes and whilst in hospital, his relatives trashed the house. So, Mort was exited from hospital straight to the streets to live in his car.

Diabetes became so bad for him being homeless that a few years after he was housed, he lost both legs. I shed a tear when I say that. It should not have happened.

It was February 2014 that I found an article from the Australian Government about Housing and Homelessness. The Federal Senate had been quested to investigate housing and homelessness and were inviting the public to reply. *'Oh boy — can we tell those pollies a thing or two about being homeless…'*

I rallied the guys together, or those that were around our car park for a discussion. Told them about the Senate inquiry and most of them laughed. *'These guys don't give a shit about us'* was the consensus. Yes, there was drugs. Yes, there was alcohol, but they were still a dam bunch of nice guys who really didn't deserve what they were dealt. For myself I was never into the drugs or alcohol scene. I was a father and seriously had to do something to tell someone that we were distressed.

Many of you recently have been through lockdown. Take what you mentally experienced in lock down, don't associate with others for fear of being called a homeless bum. Sleep on your patio without a blanket in the middle of Winter and that comes close to knowing what being homeless is about. Oh yeah — about once a fortnight, the local yahoo's come calling

around 2am while you're trying to sleep. They spit at you, throw bottles at you, and if you get too close and give them some lip, they will drop you. That's when your best mate comes bounding out of the car and attacks. *'Get the dog off me. Get the dog off me'* he shrieked. *'Nah — Scooby KILL…'*

Sometime in February 2014, I rang the Senate office and asked the lass on the other end if 'us homeless' could put in a written proposal. '*Of course,*' she said. *'We'd love to have you write something.*' So, I did. My son and I were granted a two-week reprieve from an organisation that took pity on our situation. We, and a few others, spent the next two weeks in Rockingham Holiday Village researching the story. I broke out the laptop and started writing.

I interviewed several for their opinion about being homeless. Gave opinions on the agencies, the State Government, the Federal Government, and homelessness itself. All wrapped up in about 28 pages of contextual reading. We rang Shelter WA and a few other agencies and tick tacked with them about homelessness and our situation in Rockingham. They were submitting their own piece. I uploaded the document, and it was received as #214 under the name of the South West Australian Homeless People or SWAHP as I like to call it. We thought and expected it to be bound for file 13 — the trash.

It was towards early April that the Senate office called and said that several Senators were asking to contact us about our document. I was dumbfounded. Greens Senator Scott Ludlam was first to call and then Labor Senator Sue Lines called soon after that. Sue apparently raised her hand with the document in Parliament and urged every Senator to read the life experience of those living rough. Scott came out for a meet and greet with pizzas on a wet and very cold night. We did a get together soon after at the local Salvo's, and I invited several of the girls and guys to come speak. Scott listened; and listened he did. The stories were heart breaking and his staff teared up as they sat quietly. Scott left as a friend and invited us to present our story to the Federal Senate.

Brookfield Place Homelessness Week exhibition

Later in May, 34-year old young homeless mother of two, lost her life to diabetes. It was an early morning that she was with her boyfriend and slipped into a coma whilst sleeping in the Rockingham bush. Scott mentioned Michelle in Federal Parliament and stated that she did not die of diabetes but died of homelessness. Never have I ever dealt with so much death until I became homeless. Something that I raised a few years ago with the University of Western Australia's, Lisa Wood. With a bit of research, Lisa concluded that in WA the homeless death is currently running at one person per week.

November the 11th 2014 and Mort, Bevan, myself and Rockingham Salvo's Darrell Wilson waited patiently to be called into the WA Parliament. It was a busy few months leading up to November with the local paper, The Sound Telegraph breaking the story of the Rockingham homeless reaching out to Parliament for our plight. The reporter from the Tele, Elise, really gave us excellent coverage and throughout the Winter of 2014 we graced the front page on several occasions.

It was mid-October of that year that I received a call from Rockingham Hospital. My son had been ambulanced in. Found with a rope around his neck. So emotional was this homeless shit that he again tried to take his own life. I was at a loss to know what to do. The doctor that rang, also had to tell me that when he turned his back on his patient, Nik slipped out the door. It was a week until I heard from him, and he rang me in tears asking if we could do something about being homeless. With Darrell's and the Salvo's help, we got him into The Beacon. A Perth based homeless shelter.

The Senate inquiry mentioned the Rockingham Homeless and thanked us gratefully for our contribution. Of the 40 suggestive proposals that the Senate put to the Federal Government on Housing and Homelessness, only nine were accepted. One of them was mine. Nothing of great significance. Just the simplicity of making Centrelink more accessible for someone who has nowhere to live. On all previous occasions, a homeless person would be directed elsewhere. Now Centrelink will at least speak to the person concerned. Even when they are blubbering in tears, kids in tow and stating they have nowhere to live.

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Lived Experience (2)

Jaron Green: I Couldn't Do It Alone

Jaron Green is one of the most honest people you could ever meet. He's been a recovered alcoholic and a drug user and survived several years sleeping rough on the streets in Perth.

40-year-old Jaron says he's far from perfect, but he's come a long way!

These days Jaron is employed by St Patrick's Community Support Centre in Fremantle and enjoys a stable home life with his partner Shelley and baby daughter, Maisie.

He's on the straight and narrow and credits his recovery to help from St Pats, support from his partner and sheer grit and determination.

Jaron ran away from home when he was 17, dropping out of school and couch surfing then sleeping wherever he could find shelter. He busked to earn a bit of money and spent anything he earned on drugs and booze.

'I dabbled in methamphetamine, LSD, MDMA, even heroin. I sometimes sold weed. I even sold meth for a while. When the guys I was dealing for started to purchase guns I was kind of shocked out of what I was doing. I had been diagnosed several times with depression, bipolar, anxiety and was known to self- harm.

'I got my act together for a while and went back to school to finish Year 12 but instead of going to university I ended up working at a nightclub and unfortunately got swept up in the party lifestyle again. It was at this time that one of my best friends I had met on the streets took his own life.'

This was a bit of a wake-up call and Jaron got a job as a duty manager at a hotel and realised he had a strong work ethic. *'I was working hard and promoted to Operations Manager but was soon overwhelmed by a stressful work and home life when I began to feel very unwell.*

'I was heavy drinking, my marriage broke down, I was made redundant, experienced depression and smoking weed.

'I felt sick one night arguing about something silly with a housemate, started vomiting and couldn't breathe, thought I would die, then my vision went black. I later started to feel better but thought I had a migraine so went to stay with my brother.

'After the migraine "aura" didn't go away while staying with my brother he said I needed to go to hospital; it turns out I had had a massive stroke and had blown a hole in my optic nerve! Fortunately, I survived though my vision would never return properly.

'But I started drinking and doing drugs again…then found out my cousin, whom I share a birthday with (he's four years younger to the day) had died from asphyxiation after shooting up methadone — his eight-year-old son found his body. I got black out drunk at his wake and abused all of the family. I hurt people and after this I just knew I had to stop. But I couldn't do it alone. I called the Centrecare EntryPoint service, got a night's stay at emergency accommodation and an appointment to stay longer with St Pats... and went to my first meeting at Alcoholics Anonymous.

'When I first moved in at St Pats, I felt like I had absolutely hit my rock bottom. I mostly hid in my room. I attended an AA meeting at least one meeting daily, started seeing a psychologist under the mental health plan, and watched a lot of Jordan Peterson YouTube videos.

'One night the fire alarm was going off and the head lodger was struggling with turning it off. Because of my previous work at a hotel, I knew where the fire panel was and was able to fix the problem. This lead to me being offered the other head lodger position. Slowly, while living at St Pats, I started to develop a new sense of responsibility.'

Jaron reluctantly accepted the job of head lodger at St Pats and over time the responsibility led to solidarity among the other lodgers.

'The people bringing in drugs were removed. The tolerance of antisocial behaviour disappeared and everyone's standard of living improved. The temporary roof became a home and a sanctuary.'

Jaron wanted to do more so also began to volunteer in the warehouse sorting clothes, which then led to a job offer.

'Unfortunately, COVID-19 interrupted my ability to do full time hours for and social work courses, but it did provide me with many more hours, as St Pats was so proactive. I even asked to join the Covid response group and sitting at the boardroom table, looking around the room — I had never felt so honoured to be amongst people who really care — who do so much for their community.

'Sometimes I still struggle with attaching my own growth to how a client at St Pat's is doing; you start to identify with their progress and short comings but I have realised this is just part of my journey.

You have to be always aware of your own limitations and maintain boundaries, protect your heart and find balance in separating the two. It's constantly in the back of my mind that I can't fix everything. I can only ever really change myself — so that's what I stay focused on. A kind of selfish selflessness.

'There's a strange power in it when you can hear someone, like a client tell you what they've done or are going through — and you can look them in the eye and say, 'I'm not better than you; I'm worse. I've been where you have been. Let's find a way out together. And I suppose that's the strength of a peer support worker. Shared, lived experience — a common history.

'I now work in the St Pat's warehouse a couple of days a week and currently transitioning to a role in the emergency relief area, as well as everybody's go to I.T. support. I'm an all-rounder, much more than the 'Peer Support Worker' role I was originally employed for. I have Fridays off to spend with my fiancé — the girl of my dreams — and my gorgeous baby girl and life is just an absolute bliss!

'Life will always bring challenges for all of us but sometimes I have to pinch myself. To get from where I was to where I am now, is like a miracle, and I am so very grateful to the people who helped me along the way, including those at St Pats... but I also know how many of my friends and colleagues are grateful for me. It's as if it's my responsibility to stay sober and positive just to prove it can be done

'I wear my heart on my sleeve and share my story because there's light within it. Being okay with not being okay. Just being open and honest is like unburdening yourself of toxicity. Admitting you're sad or stressed out to a friend or partner. Saying: "I need help". But also knowing when to say 'no' and being true to myself, not just a people pleaser and embracing that shadow side, the anger, channel it appropriately. Make it useful. Tell the truth and always be authentic and the cherry on top is always add a splash of humour. I'm also really humble. Nobody's as humble as me.'

Social Activism through Art: Street to Street Artist in Residency Project

Royceton Hardey, Shelter WA and Deborah Ralph-Kafarela

Pragmatic art practice and social activism in art are movements which engage the community to become the artist rather than an artist just telling the story.

STREET TO STREET is a 400-piece sculptural installation which challenges institutional boundaries by giving voice to people with Lived Experience of Housing Insecurity and Homelessness, through direct participation in a community-based arts project. This collaborative art project is based on work done by American Artist Rick Lowe and was developed by Shelter WA's first artist-in-residence Deborah Ralph-Kafarela.

A devotee to his Rick Lowe's work Deborah liked his 'commentary on social issues in his country'. *'One day he found a row of derelict houses and then he approached the appropriate authorities to obtain them,' she said. With funding and a similar minded art collective joining Rick in the process the houses were artistically transformed under the banner of 'found objects'.*

'The whole community was involved in renovating them, cleaning them up and painting them. When they finished one house became a support house and all the rest were turned into housing for single mums. This was his goal. To use art to make a real practical and tangible difference.'

STREET TO STREET follows a similar journey as Deborah replicates the same process in Perth. 'This is a big idea, and we have started off small. So, this first phase is a teaser if you like, to engage the community of lived experience, community organisations that are on the ground helping and other sectors to gain interest heading into phase two.

Supported by the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Lotterywest and the City of Perth Phase One of Street to Street engaged 89 people with lived experience of homelessness through six community art workshops. Service providers commented on the impact of the workshops on people who attended. The workshops created a safe space and through the art process enabled new conversations to be held between people and providers with the shared focussing forming relationships of equity and trust. This opened up new possibilities and ways of working with people to support them to address issues that they were facing in their lives.

Artist Deborah Ralph-Kafarela

Phase One

Phase one was carried out at St. Patrick's Community Support Centre, Ruah Community Services and Uniting WA's Tranby Centre.

'Artists' who chose to be involved worked on prefabricated wooden houses made to the 'size of a hug'. *'We say that because the houses are quite an intimate piece of work,'* Deborah said.

'Designed by a cutter the houses can be pulled apart like a jigsaw. Then using stencils, the "artists" were encouraged to embellish the houses with stencil designs of the exterior cladding, gardens and interior objects that make a home a home for each participant.

'There are beds, tables, chairs and even things like pets and flower boxes, everything you can think of to make a comfortable house were made available.'

Deborah worked with other artists to maintain the collaborative feel and to make it as inclusive as possible. Both Jeanette Garlett and mentor Denise V Brown brought their creativity to the stencils through Aboriginal artwork and disability friendly components needed for accessible housing.

'We are using the stencil templates to have some continuity through the artwork but at the same time

Street to Street Art Exhibition

we are creating so many different types of objects this gives enough of a variation to keep people interested. Also, the use of the stencils is so many people from the street are so traumatised that it is very difficult for them to engage in something like art when they are just trying to survive to eat. We want to cater for everyone.'

Lived Experience

You may be wondering given the sensitivity and empathy needed when working with people who are experiencing homelessness how Deborah managed to navigate the challenges present when creating a collaborative work of this scale.

Deborah is a highly qualified and skilled Perth based artist. Also, Deborah has lived experience of homelessness and has worked in a number of community services that provide support for people experiencing homelessness.

Art Practice

With every artist, they travel an experimental journey on what artistic approach works best to convey their message or a story. Deborah realised early on what didn't work.

'I don't believe in shock art or exploitation,' she said. 'I see some artists will shock culture into change, but it does not work, the person makes a lot of money as an artist and gains fame but the people who they are talking about they exploit in the process of making the art, so those people's lives don't improve.

'My approach is to tell the story in a way which empowers or helps change. As an artist I'm moving away from being a visual commentator on society to a facilitator.'

Social Activism in Art

Pragmatic art practice and social activism in art are types of movements which engage the community to become the artist rather than an artist just telling the story.

Deborah worked with the local Midland community during her time as Artist in Focus in 2019 and developed a series of large-scale artworks across five installations that challenged cultural values of rough sleeping and homelessness. In response to *The Western Australian Strategy to End Homelessness 2018–2028*. Multa Plenty aimed to address issues of equality and displacement, by recognizing abundance and emphasizing that there is more than enough to go around. More than 2000 people were engaged in social activism in the art space, their workplace, schools, homes, churches, local government, not-for-profit organisations and community making art that had practical application in supporting people who were experiencing homelessness.

'When we go into a gallery space if it's our art and people are coming to view it there is a limited audience,' Deborah said. 'But if an artist engages the community to become an artist, particularly on a human rights topic then instead of having one person tell a story there can be an unlimited number involved in the process.'

Stage Two

Stage Two of the Street-to-Street project is planned as a community led sculptural installation by artists and people with lived experience of homelessness leading to a larger permanent housing art project. This will be reflective of the American artist Rick Lowe's *Project Row Houses*.[1] This project will use art as an engine for social transformation.

Endnote

1. *https://www.ricklowe.com*

Artist Deborah Ralph Kafarela with members of the St Patrick's Starlight Hotel Choir

Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness in Remote Western Australia

Jo Sadler, State Director Mission Australia Western Australia and Northern Territory
and Noleen Mongoo, Program Manager Mission Australia Meekatharra

Domestic and family violence is a major driver of homelessness in Australia. In 2020–21, 116,200 Specialist Homelessness Services clients had experienced family and domestic violence, equating to 42 per cent of all clients.[1] This issue is particularly acute in remote areas of Australia. In 2020–21, around one-third (33.9 per cent) of those from remote/very remote areas reported domestic and family violence as their main reason for seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services, higher than those from major cities or inner or outer regional areas.[2]

In remote WA, where Mission Australia works in this field, we see the impacts of geographical distance on the ability of women and children to seek help when they need it.

Access to services due to remoteness is a major barrier to ensuring needed support. In particular, a scarcity of crisis accommodation and longer-term housing are acute challenges for the women and children we work with. Poor housing conditions and severe overcrowding can contribute to making violence worse and increasing the vulnerability of women and children to abuse and violence from a range of potential perpetrators.

Social isolation can be another significant barrier to help-seeking for women experiencing domestic and family violence. Community members may also be reluctant to ask for help because of concerns about their privacy in smaller more interconnected communities. It can also make recruiting for skilled staff members in very small communities challenging.

These are significant issues, given the high incidence of family violence-related homelessness in remote areas.

Mission Australia has a number of domestic and family violence services located in regional and remote WA, including Nyarlu Duwa in Meekatharra and Family Violence Coordinated Response Outreach Services throughout the Midwest Gascoyne and Pilbara.

Nyarlu Duwa (Woman House in Wadjari) is a family and domestic violence and emergency accommodation service based in Meekatharra. Nyarlu Duwa is available for both crisis intervention as well as for women who recognise escalating patterns of behaviour and wish to remove themselves and their children from potentially dangerous situations and avoid further trauma. In this way, the service is very much part of the safety plan for women in surrounding areas who are at high risk of violence.

Nyarlu Duwa also works with women and children at risk of homelessness to find suitable accommodation either in their community, with family in neighbouring communities or elsewhere. Women and children who come into the service are assisted with a range of supports including housing applications, accessing income support through Centrelink and seeking legal advice from law services to help them to remain safe.

The majority of women and children accessing this service identify as Aboriginal. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional, rural and remote communities, temporary stays at refuges, like Nyarlu Duwa, are often used as a way of staying safe.

The Meekatharra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group (MARG) has played a crucial role in shaping and delivering the Nyarlu Duwa service. This has been a key partnership for Mission Australia and we recognise that any services intended to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander need to be co-designed and implemented with community members, elders and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure they are culturally adapted and effective.

At the local level, we need to make sure that service providers have strong relationships with the local community and a strong understanding of

local cultures, both of which are critical to developing the necessary trust for community members to accept support from services.

In working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children — because family violence is conceptualised in terms of wider family and community relations rather than a single intimate partnership — we need to support holistic responses that focus on violence prevention, integration with cultural health and healing families, and that put Elders at the centre.

At the national level, we need strategies that prevent and respond to domestic and family violence and to resulting homelessness. This includes universal domestic and family prevention strategies like community strengthening and early respectful relationships education, interventions that respond to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence and act to prevent homelessness such as safe at home programs for women and housing for men who use violence, and an adequate supply of social and affordable housing so that everyone can have a safe, secure and affordable home.

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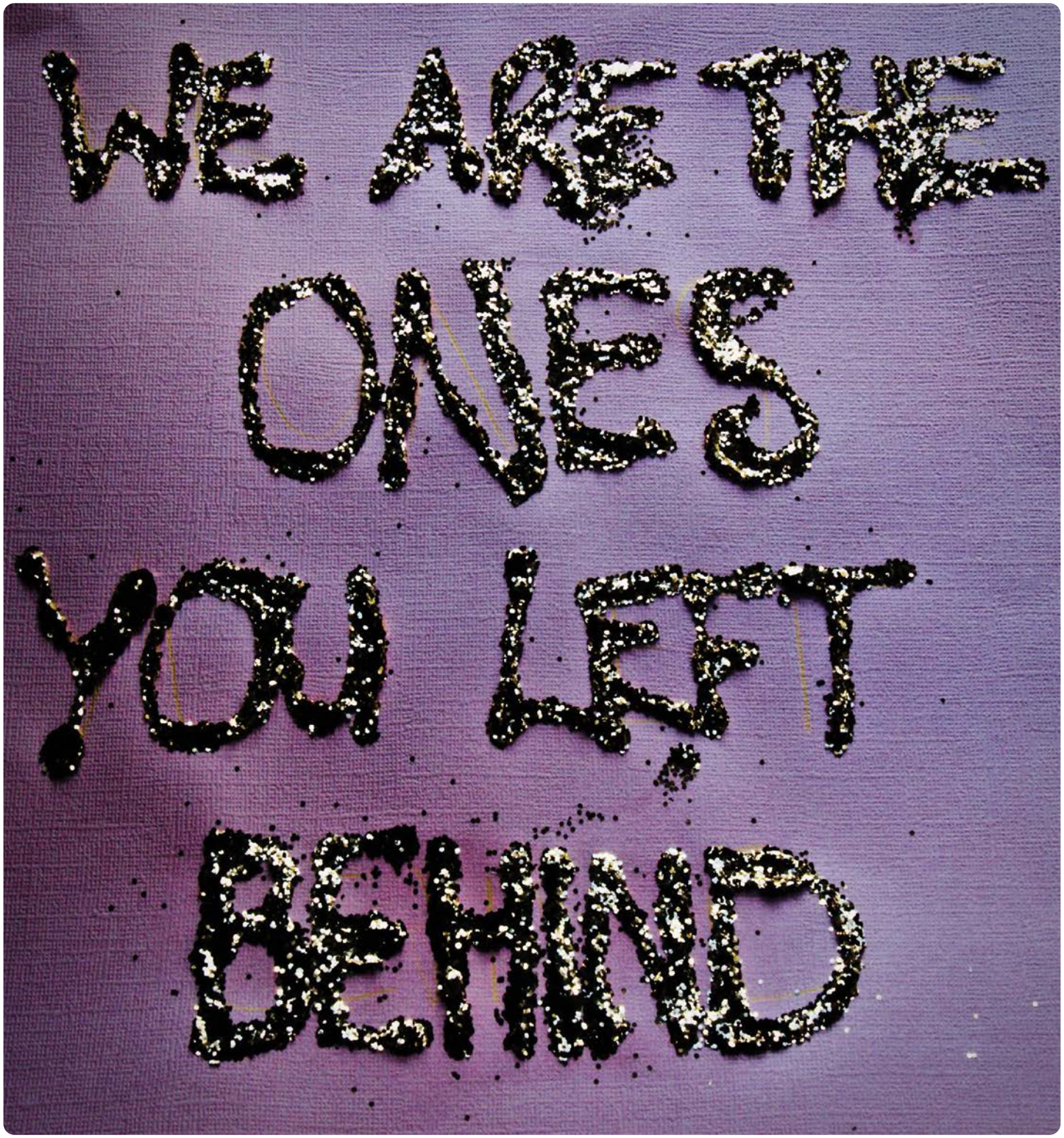

Securing Safe and Long-term Housing: How Zonta House Challenges the Nexus of Family and Domestic Violence and Homelessness

Christine Cooke, Zonta House, ReSet Reintegration Case Worker

Introduction

Family and domestic violence (FDV) is a gendered issue that occurs in most societies irrespective of culture, status, wealth or religion.[1] Multiple forms of abuse characterise FDV resulting in physical, sexual and/or psychological damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour which causes the victim to live in fear.[2] In Australia, one in four women have had physical or sexual violence perpetrated upon them by a current or previous intimate partner since the age of 15.[3]

The impacts of FDV and coercive control are manifold and can have life-long implications for individuals and families. FDV also disrupts housing security and is the primary contributor to homelessness for women and their children,[4] with victim survivors making up 41 per cent of Specialist Homeless Services (SHS) clients in 2019–2020. SHS agencies provide frontline crisis responses for women and children who are forced to leave their home to seek safety, however, Flanagan et al. (2018) purport, data suggests such services have limited capacity to provide pathways into safe and secure long-term housing.

Zonta House Refuge Association (Zonta House) endeavours to interrupt the intersection of FDV and homelessness by providing avenues into safe and secure long-term housing for victim survivors. Trauma informed, wrap-around support is provided to women to address FDV caused homelessness through programs that target prevention, intervention and post crisis support. In addition to the two refuges and transitional accommodation, Zonta House also coordinates several other services including Safer Pathways, Positive Pathways, and Future Employment Connections (FEC). The purpose of this article is to explore these programs and highlight that effective service delivery must include a range of interventions and integrative support services to achieve long-term housing stability.

Prevention

Zonta House coordinates outreach programs that reduce the risk of homelessness caused by FDV through supporting women to feel safe in their own homes and/or advocating for safer long-term housing. The Safer Pathways program is a Zonta House and Department of Communities collaboration providing FDV specialist support to women who are social housing tenants residing in the Victoria Park and Cannington regional office zones, or for women and their children experiencing FDV who are seeking priority waitlisting.

The program provides supports and interventions to keep women and children safe in their homes or supports them with advocacy for urgent priority transfers if it unsafe for them to remain in their property. This is achieved through comprehensive risk assessment, safety planning, case management as well as education and capacity strengthening for tenants and Housing Support Officers (HSOs) and other Departmental staff. Women who are supported to stay in their homes safely have easier access to their usual support networks, such as social connections, workplaces and schools. (5) Social connectedness and strong relationships are a significant protective factor in reducing FDV, in addition to contributing to positive housing outcomes for individuals.[6,7]

In 2020–2021, 55 women were provided support by the Safer Pathways program, all of which stated they would recommend the service.

Intervention

Victim survivors may experience homelessness after escaping FDV and seeking safety for themselves and their children. Efficient intervention and support in securing long-term safe accommodation is required for FDV caused homelessness. Zonta House offers emergency accommodation at two women's refuges that support single women over the age of 18. Zonta House delivers effective crisis support that interrupts housing instability and establishes trust and rapport with clients to deliver appropriate support. This support includes case management, resources, advocacy, information, and warm referrals. Evidence has indicated that many women who exit refuges experience numerous challenges including financial difficulties, lack of support, and mental health issues.[8]

Even after housing has been secured, lack of support or skills in maintaining property can result in homelessness.[9] Continuity of support is critical in reducing re-victimisation and homelessness.[10] Transitional housing is one approach that Zonta House utilises to offer continued support in safe, affordable accommodation for women exiting crisis accommodation. Zonta House manages 16 transitional and long-term beds located across different sites. Trauma informed case management is utilised to develop individual plans with clients to strengthen their existing capacity and support

their healing and recovery. Clients are also provided resources, advocacy, and warm referrals to specialist services to assist in obtaining longer-term housing. The continued support and holistic case management that Zonta House delivers during times of housing crisis for victim survivors of FDV promotes safe long-term housing.

Post-crisis Support

Zonta House operates two outreach programs that offer education and support in enhancing various skills, coping strategies and social connection to victim survivors; which can assist with long-term housing. Kaleveld et al[11] asserts that tenancy and social support is predominantly required even after housing is established to reduce the risk of future homelessness. The FEC and Positive Pathways programs aim to support women by empowering them with numerous skills and strengths in areas of employment, education, women's wellness, personal safety, financial independence, connectivity and assertive communication. The FEC program offers employment and training support for victim survivors with the overall aim of economic independence.

This focused specialist support enhances the likelihood of success towards economic independence and community integration in a safe environment. People transitioning from homelessness can become confined in a state of poverty due to very low rates of employment.[12] The risk of homelessness and poverty increases for women who escape domestic violence.[13] Economic independence gained through the FEC program can assist victim survivors in securing and maintaining long-term housing. The FEC program supported 25 women in 2019-2020 which produced numerous positive outcomes. Upon exit of the program 36 per cent of women gained employment, 57 per cent participated in work experience placements, 12 per cent participated in volunteering opportunities, 100 per cent of women exited with an up-to-date resume, 75 per cent of women exited with an up-to-date cover letter, 92 per cent of women exited had clear employment goals, 52 per cent of women were happy with their current employment situation.

Zonta House's Positive Pathways program aims to decrease the impact and promote safety for women and children impacted by FDV and prevent further FDV within the community. The program can assist in minimising the risk of FDV caused homelessness by strengthening women's skills and knowledge in various forms of independence and empowerment. FDV can disconnect women socially to increase control and power over victim survivors.[14] Positive Pathways encourages increased self-esteem by fostering feelings of social inclusion, connectivity and enriching assertive communication skills and coping strategies. Some of the programs include sound therapy, yoga, trauma education, parenting workshop, money management, keeping safe, resilience and self-esteem. As previously discussed, a client's support network can make a significant positive difference to housing outcomes. The program supported 138 women in 2019–2020 with the facilitation of 87 workshops.

Conclusion

Effective service provision must respond to women experiencing FDV and homelessness through a range of interventions and integrative support services. Zonta House coordinates services that comprehensively focus on women's safety and long-term, stable housing. Zonta House also efficiently collaborates with other services within the sector to establish long-term tenancies through social and community housing, and private rentals. The holistic framework that Zonta House implements enables wrap around support across other domains in the lives of victim survivors which strengthens their abilities and confidence in sustaining those tenancies for long-term safety and security. Programs and services within Zonta House including crisis and transitional accommodation, Safer Pathways, FEC and Positive Pathways empower women who have intersections of FDV and homelessness to experience long-term safety and stability in their lives.

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Why Listening to Homeless Children is Crucial

Maddie McLeod and Amy Green, Valuing Children Initiative

All children are invisible to adults to some extent, even those lucky enough to be born into a family with relative wealth or privilege.

Consider a six-year-old as she walks into a doctor's surgery with her mother. She can't see over the reception desk and isn't acknowledged by the receptionist. The magazines are for adults and the toys in the corner are for babies and toddlers. The chair in the waiting room is for adults and the girl's feet don't reach the ground.

When she sees the doctor, he says hello to her but asks her mother to tell him what is wrong with her. Her mother describes the pain in her tummy incorrectly. The doctor says he wants to 'rule out appendicitis', but she doesn't know what this is or why he would want to use a ruler to rule it out.

The doctor's hands are cold as he presses on her tummy and it hurts; the girl feels scared but doesn't say anything. This is an ordinary and everyday experience. All children will have experiences like this, and they become an ordinary part of childhood.

Our society uses explicit and implicit messaging to teach children to accept things as they are and that adults know better than them. Whether it is a small thing or a big thing, many children do not speak up when they feel uncomfortable or when something is wrong. In the above scenario, the adults would describe the same events differently and consequently, the experience of the child is easily missed.

In a society where it is common for adults to misunderstand or overlook the experience of children, how do we ensure our vulnerable children — such as children experiencing homelessness — have a voice?

Shayna's Story

Three years. That's how long 12-year-old Shayna*[1] spent sleeping on a blow-up mattress, bouncing between the houses of various family members.

Shayna and her four siblings became homeless in 2018 after their mother broke free from an abusive relationship. Since then the family of six struggled to find permanent housing, eventually settling for the lounge-room floor of their grandmother's three-bedroom home.

Although grateful to have a roof over her head, the chaos of living with nine other people took a toll on Shayna.

'I just felt really crowded and overwhelmed, and stressed like all the time,' she said.

Shayna would go to school every day worried her classmates would discover she was homeless.

'If they found out I would get stressed and angry,' she said.

'They would tell other people and everyone would know I didn't have my own house.'

Shayna's mum is a recovering drug user. Despite being clean for the last few years, she was often refused private rentals due to her history and the number of children she had.

The possibility of going into care became a scary reality for Shayna and the relationship with her mother deteriorated.

'I felt like I couldn't really do anything. She would always get really overwhelmed and get really cranky and it would affect everyone,' Shayna said.

'I would go online when I had time, or when I was bored, and try to help mum get a house.

'It made me start to get behind in work and lose focus in class because I was thinking about it all the time.'

Although it's clear that unstable and unsuitable housing has impacted Shayna's education it's not something she's raised with teachers. It's telling that Shayna would rather fall behind in school than approach her teacher about the disruptive nature of her home life.

Three years without a bed.
Three years without privacy.
Three years of uncertainty.

Kids are Individuals in Their Own Right

Shayna's story isn't unique. Her voice is echoed by the 1,949 West Australian children and young people are homeless.[2]

While a child's experience of homelessness is vastly different to that of adults, their specific challenges often go unnoticed. Children who access homelessness services with their families are of course part of that family system. They are also individuals in their own right.

Adults accessing homelessness support services are likely to receive a service response tailored to his or her unique needs — think mental health support, assistance to overcome substance use issues or to understand violent relationships. However, children in these families are typically

viewed as an extension of their parents and therefore miss out on the bespoke support that they need.

During the three years she was homeless, Shayna rarely recalls being asked by an adult what she needs or how she feels.

In reflection, her one wish was simple: 'Involve me more.'

Shayna simply wanted to fit in with her classmates and have the same experiences commonly shared in most childhoods.

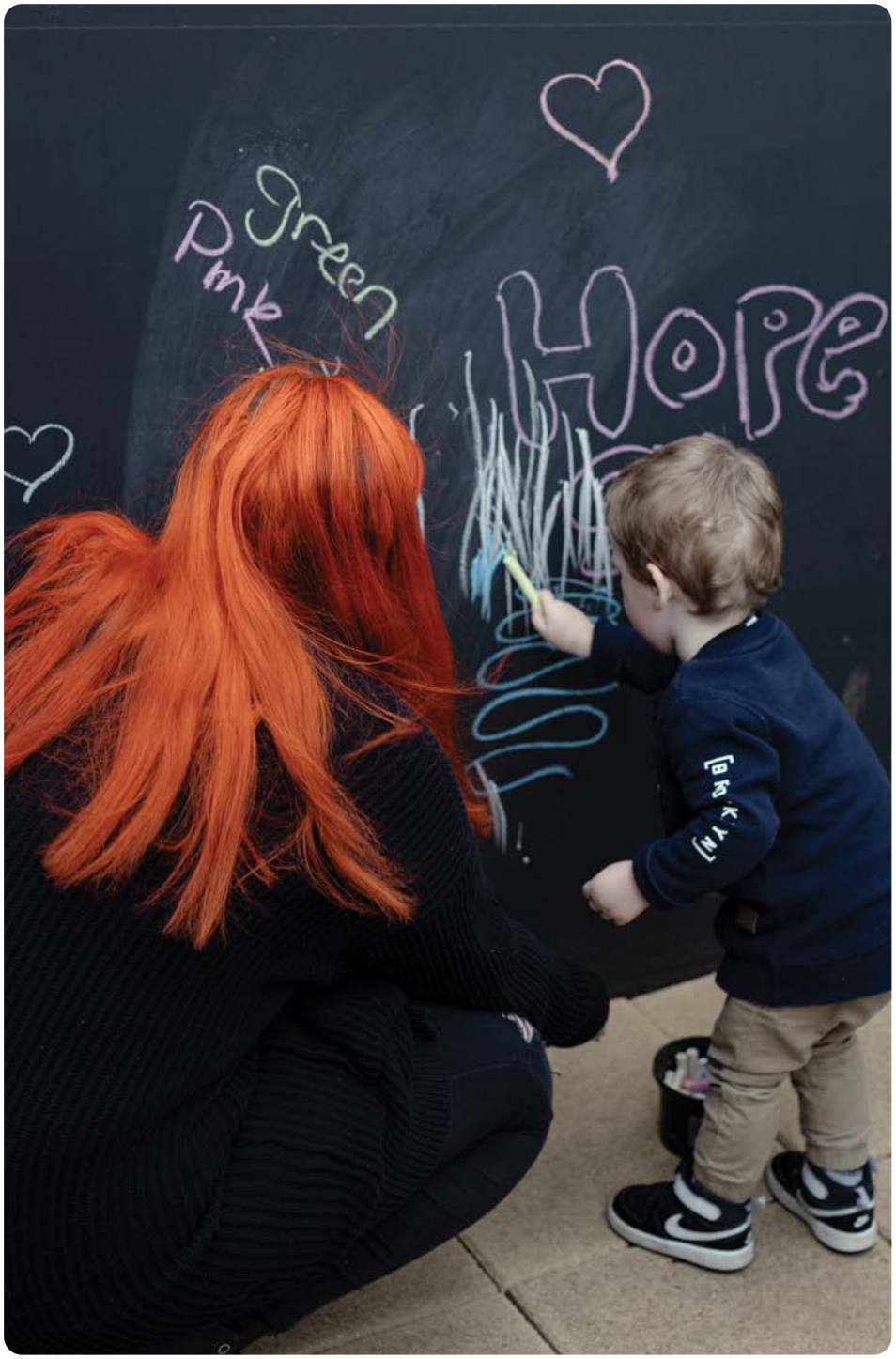
A quiet place to do homework.
A cupboard for her clothes.
A birthday party.

'My friends had birthday parties all the time, people over whenever they wanted,' Shayna said.

'When I would go over to my friends' I kind of felt jealous that they had their own house and room and it made me feel different from them.'

After moving into a home through Centrecare's Family Accommodation Service, Shayna finally had a birthday party for the very first time.

'It was really fun and I felt normal.'



The Long-term

We know that children who experience homelessness with their parents are more likely to experience homelessness as adults and that experiencing homelessness in childhood has immediate and long-term consequences.[3]

The *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Survey*[4] surveyed youth in the 13 to 25 age range (median age of 18) and this survey provided important insights into the needs and experiences of young people experiencing homelessness. The survey showed that many young people who experience family homelessness often do so as a result of domestic violence or substance abuse issues within the family.

Nine out of 10 homeless young people surveyed in *The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* project reported that they have seen violence between family members and one in six had run away from home more than ten times because of violence. For many, this happened at a very young age (median age of first-time leaving home was 10 years.)

When children become young people who access homelessness services *in their own right*, we seek to understand and support them as individuals and our data collection for this cohort has improved as evidenced by this survey. However, the unique experiences of younger children impacted by family homelessness is largely unexplored.

There is a need to boost programs directed at children in difficult home environments, but this can only be done when we listen to their experiences.

There is still limited visibility of children in homelessness data — particularly in situations of overcrowding. Limited data collection means the experience of children in homeless families is largely disregarded.

Inadequate data collection also means the services that are delivered are much less likely to consider the needs of children as individuals but the importance of prevention and early intervention services for these children is clear.

To make meaningful change it is critical that as much focus is placed on children as is placed on the adult clients who access homelessness support programs. Children will of course benefit if their parents and families are supported to address homelessness risk factors like family violence and substance use. However, kids like Shayna are also in need of child-specific support — things like assistance to talk to teachers about their home situation, advice on how to navigate difficult conversations with peers, tutoring and connecting them with local sport and recreational activities.

It's also vital that we recognise and address the impact of homelessness on children in the here and now. This is well expressed by Emerging Minds in their submission to the 2021 Senate enquiry into homelessness.

> *'Housing stress impacts housing stability and parenting capacity which has an impact on children's social and emotional wellbeing and development. Frequent moves impact on social connection (educational and community) which impacts on the support network of the family and can have cascading impacts on children's mental health as they grow and develop.'*[5]

The Federal Government's Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia didn't include a single quote from a child about his or her experience of homelessness. It is difficult to imagine how meaningful change will occur if we continue to omit the views and experiences of an entire generation.

Homelessness Australia made the case that: *'Rigorous research has shown that there is no single intervention more effective in ending homelessness and preventing its reoccurrence than providing public housing.'*[6] If we consider that in Western Australia, 98 per cent of private rentals are not affordable for people earning the minimum wage and zero per cent are affordable for people in receipt of Newstart Allowance, the importance of public housing is clear.[7]

As of June 30, 2020, there were 7,469 children and young people were on the public housing wait list in Western Australia.[8]

Street to Street Art Exhibition

It is a sad truth that most children do not expect to be acknowledged by adults or to have their needs considered. Vulnerable children, such as those experiencing homelessness are even less likely to be able to advocate for themselves.

Children rely on adults to support them and as a society, we have a collective responsibility to ensure all children are given the opportunities and supports they need to reach their full potential. This is the right of every child[9] and ensuring children are valued and given a voice is fundamental to achieving this. Kids like Shayna are relying on us.

* Name changed to maintain confidentiality.

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Study of the Health Needs of Older Women Experiencing Homelessness in the Perth Metropolitan Area

Dr Gloria Sutherland, The University of Notre Dame Australia*

Women aged over 50 years represent the most rapidly growing cohort of the Australian homeless population. Complex and inter-related social and economic factors contribute to their state of homelessness, including family breakdown, history of trauma and abuse, and financial insecurity. In this study, access to safe and secure accommodation was found to be pivotal to women's health and wellbeing. Also, not having a stable place in which to live, combined with their getting older, contributed to their physical and mental health problems including chronic disease, fatigue, exhaustion, and depression.

Background

Drawing on the principles of the World Health Organisation's social determinants of health, this study sought to investigate the personal life circumstances of older homeless women who live in the Perth metropolitan area, their healthcare needs and to identify any barriers to their accessing healthcare.

When viewed through a social determinants' lens, the challenges of women facing homelessness comprise poverty, women's traditional roles, social disconnection and domestic violence and access to healthcare and support services. The provision of stable, secure, and long-term housing with ongoing support is fundamental to addressing the health needs of these women.

Methods

The study comprised three phases. The first consisted of an online survey of specialist homelessness service providers to obtain basic information regarding their services to older homeless women and to seek their willingness to act a referral source for women for the study. The second phase comprised a survey and semi-structured interview with 22 older homeless women aged between 48 and 82 years (average age 60 years) to identify and explore:

- the personal circumstances and homelessness history of the women involved
- their healthcare needs, use of healthcare and other support services
- any barriers to healthcare
- what actions could be undertaken to help improve their health and wellbeing of older homeless women.

The second phase also comprised semi-structured interviews consisting of similar questions, which were also undertaken with eight specialist homelessness service providers and seven healthcare providers including medical practitioners, nurses and a clinical psychologist with experience of working with older homeless women.

Recommendations were then presented to a Panel of 17 experts including women with lived experience of homelessness, key specialist homelessness and health providers. The Panel helped confirm the major study outcomes and set priorities for actions and strategies that would best improve the healthcare available to older homeless women living within the Perth metropolitan area.

Findings

Nine major themes emerged from the results of interviews, which highlighted the complexity of women's experience of homelessness and inter-related nature of their homelessness, and their health needs as follows:

Figure 1: Key interview themes

1. Accommodation and safety

Each of the participants were asked about their perceived health needs and what factors were important to attaining good health. The women overwhelmingly responded that accommodation and feeling safe was pivotal to their health and wellbeing.

> *'a proper home environment to live in … in a place where I can rest, sleep and relax'…*
> *'If you feel safe and secure, you can feel well within yourself too'*
> — older woman.

Healthcare and homelessness services providers stressed the importance of accommodation and safety as fundamental to the health needs of older women, and also that the women require ongoing support as they settle into accommodation where other issues can emerge, particularly relating to previous trauma. This includes the need for housing to address homelessness, but also concerns about personal safety, store food and other personal items and a place to maintain relationships with family members and their friends.

2. Women's experience of trauma and abuse

Women's past experience with violence and abuse was significant, with most of them experiencing family violence during the course of their lives, and which continued to affect the mental and physical health. Women who had experienced abuse from their male partners reported being afraid or being reluctant to see male providers. Healthcare providers reiterated the need to better understand the impact of trauma and the need for trauma informed services for women experiencing homelessness.

> *'Most of the women that we see coming through have experienced violence either during their times on the streets, or the domestic violence led them to becoming homeless in the first place … we've seen older women come through that.'*
> — Homelessness service provider

3. Impact on health due to an inability to fulfil women's role as family nurturer

Many of the women had become estranged from their families through family conflict and embarrassment about being homeless which caused them great distress. Healthcare and homelessness service providers also observed that women's relationship with their children and their families had a significant impact on their health, and their homelessness had created a painful disconnection and loss of family. Where possible homelessness service providers endeavoured to support reconciliation.

> *'that's another wound they walk around with, that they've lost their children, or they've let their children down.'*
> — Homelessness service provider

4. Mental health

Over half the women reported pre-existing mental health concerns that were exacerbated by their homelessness. For many, their mental health condition was both a predisposing factor and an outcome of their homelessness, which added complexity to their healthcare and support needs. Depression, sleeping problems and fatigue were experienced by most of the women. Providers spoke of how women experience stress and depression because of their homelessness experience, considered that mental illness was a major health issue for older homeless women, suggesting this may be related to the chronic trauma and / or from FDV they had experienced.

5. Complex interaction of physical and mental health needs

The majority of women reported having a complex mix of both mental health and physical health issues. Most of the women confided they had major mental health concerns aggravated by multiple physical health conditions, including exhaustion, insomnia and pain. Providers reported that the women needed significant support to manage their complex health needs, and the multiple, chronic and co-existing health conditions that were exacerbated by their homelessness situation and that women tended to neglect their health needs, often presenting late to the acute health system. Those sleeping rough were in the worst health of women experiencing homelessness.

> *'complex mental and physical health needs can be viewed as one of the primary and pervasive reasons as to why older women encounter homelessness, and remain in the cycle of homelessness'*
> — Homelessness service provider

6. Stigma, shame and embarrassment and fear of being judged

All the women reported a high level of shame and fear of stigma that prevented them from seeking healthcare where they may need to disclose their living situation or admit they have a mental health condition. Many were reluctant to tell healthcare providers they were homeless for fear of being judged.

> *'When I became homeless, I was too embarrassed to go and see my GP because he's known me all my life and I felt like… I'm going to have to admit I actually am a failure at the moment in my life'*
> — older woman

Providers agreed that women experience significant shame and embarrassment about being homeless, which, in turn, impacts on their health and their capacity to seek help.

7. Financial security

Many women had become homeless subsequent to the breakdown of their relationship. Several of them had been evicted having been unable to pay their rent and transitioned into homelessness including couch surfing, sleeping in cars and sleeping rough on the streets. Women's ongoing financial distress impacted and continued to impact their mental and physical health.

> *'I didn't even know how to write my name… I'd become illiterate… I couldn't even write my name I was shaking that much'*
> — Older Woman

They were initially unaware of how to access financial support including social security support. Women living on the streets spoke of how they had their ID and cards stolen.

8. Cost of healthcare services and pharmaceuticals

All the women spoke of their need to find bulk-billing GPs and medical specialists, and affordable allied health providers and dentists. The cost of medications was problematic for them, especially particularly where they had been prescribed numerous medications and were unable to pay the gap of a pensioner discount. Many women had back pain and most women needed dental and optometry services. Virtually all said the cost of dental care is prohibitive, with long waiting lists for free services.

9. The need for ongoing psychosocial and healthcare support once housed.

While housing was an essential step to recovery, the majority of women also needed ongoing support for mental and physical health care. Women spoke of how staff at the homelessness services had helped them initially access social security, healthcare and accommodation. The importance of continuing to support women once they have found accommodation was stressed by providers, and that this should incorporate the provision of healthcare and specific services to support women who have experienced trauma and abuse, for supportive services and a need to develop and/or re-connect with social contacts and networks once the women were housed.

> *'sometimes the hardest time for some of the women is not necessarily being sleeping rough, it's the trauma that comes to the surface once they're housed'*
>
> — Healthcare provider

In addition to the issues captured within the themes, additional challenges and barriers to healthcare were raised.

1. Ability to access the system

Many women reported difficulties, especially in their early stages of being homeless, of not knowing where to access support for housing and other services. Providers played a significant role in assisting the women navigate the complex network of government and healthcare services.

2. Interagency communication and collaboration

The interviews with all participants highlighted the challenges and need for effective interagency communication and coordination to support the needs of the homeless. Several services were making significant inroads to address these problems.

3. Availability female healthcare providers

Many women wanted access to women's health services with female health providers as they 'heard them' as they 'understand female problems', with many refusing to attend a service if there were no female staff. Health service providers agreed that not having access to a female provider is a barrier to accessing healthcare for many women, particularly those who had experienced trauma and abuse, and that providing women access to a female health provider considerably enhances the likelihood of women accessing healthcare services.

4. Culturally and linguistically appropriate services

While most women expressed a desire for access to female staffed healthcare services, women also highlighted the importance of these being culturally appropriate to meet their needs.

5. Awareness raising

A constant theme throughout the research was the stigma and judgment attached to homelessness. Interviewees agreed that education is required for healthcare providers and the broader community, enabling them to understand why people experience homelessness.

> ' [you need to] *unpack the myth of homelessness... it's not a choice – it's the layers beneath that, why they have become homeless, what has contributed to the reasons behind that.*
>
> — Homelessness service provider

Conclusion

The provision of suitable long-term housing was seen as fundamental to addressing the health needs of older women experiencing homelessness. The study also highlighted the need for greater understanding of the emotional and physical abuse these women had experienced, which continued to affect their mental and physical health even after they had accessed short-term accommodation.

The panel supported the need to address service fragmentation and stressed the need for effective interagency communication and collaboration. The panel also emphasized the need for collaboration across Commonwealth and State Government funded agencies to provide ongoing health, housing and social support services.

Recommendations

Access to safe, affordable, long-term housing with wrap-around and ongoing social and healthcare support services is essential to meet the immediate and ongoing health needs of older women experiencing homelessness and to address their underlying and ongoing trauma and mental health needs to prevent further episodes of homelessness.

Other key recommendations include the provision of sustainable funding to enable homelessness services to provide or refer women to psychosocial and healthcare support from the initial stages of their homelessness and after they access accommodation; that healthcare providers be educated of the importance for early identification of older homeless women to facilitate early intervention in terms of housing and healthcare and an understanding the women's feelings of shame, embarrassment, grief and estrangement from family and their need to re-connect and maintain their relationship with their children. It is also recommended that healthcare providers provide the option to access female healthcare providers. Future policy action requires the development of integrated service models to meet the unique needs of these women within a social determinants of health framework through a consultative process, including the genuine, collaboration and inclusion of older women with lived experience of homelessness.

* Link to thesis https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/275/

Youth Homelessness: Dixie's Story

Jo Sadler, State Director Mission Australia, Western Australia
and Robyn Fernihough, Area Manager Mission Australia

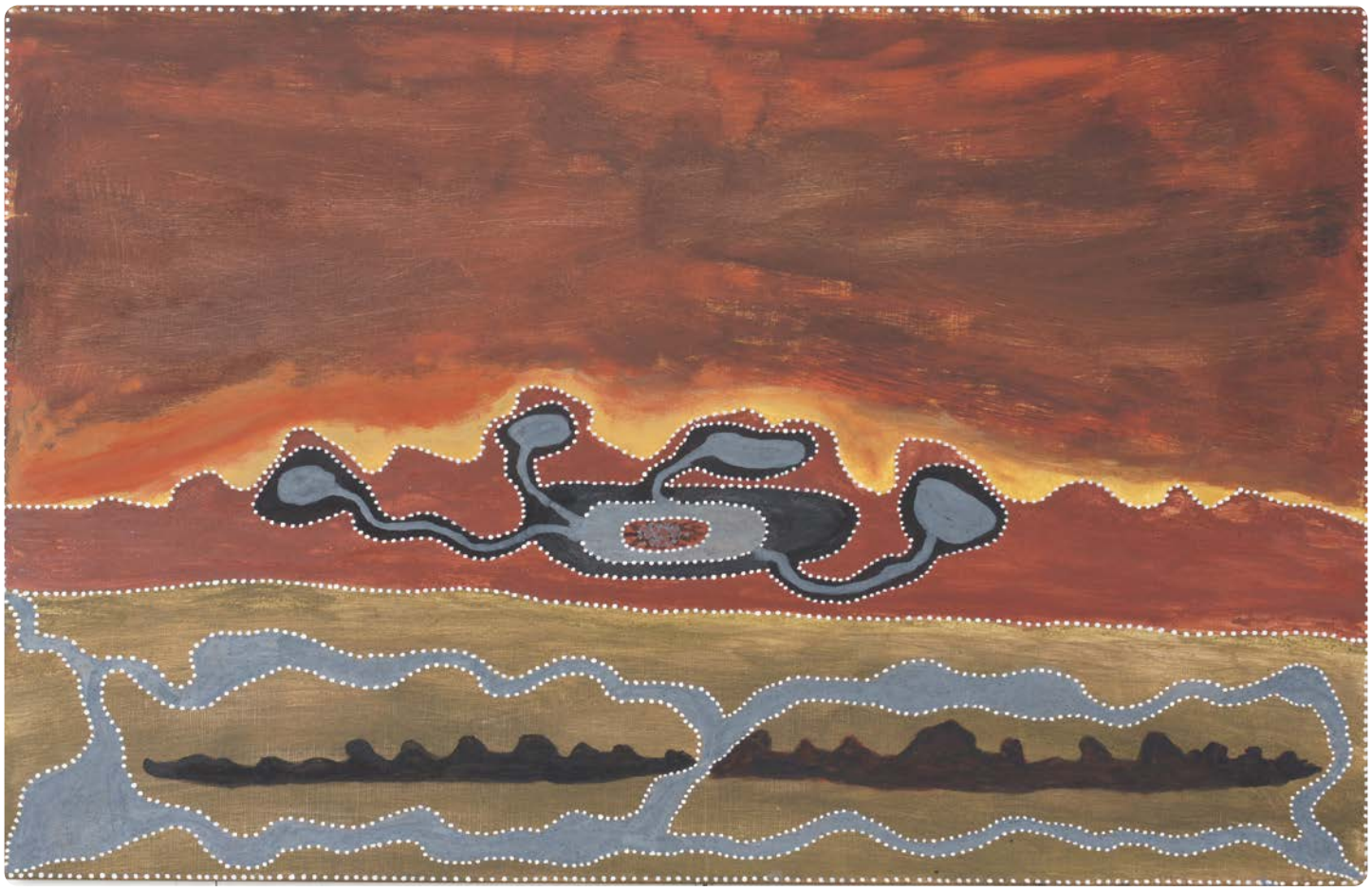
Homelessness can be devastating to young people's development and its effects are often long-lasting. Stable, affordable and suitable housing is essential for every young person's economic, mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is also connected to a positive sense of self, good health, social cohesion and educational completion.[1]

The total costs of health services and the justice system due to young people experiencing homelessness is an average of $17,868 per person per year, not including the additional lifetime impact of early school leaving and low engagement with employment.[2]

Shifting to an early intervention and prevention approach through models such as the Reconnect program and the Community of Schools and Services are a priority for homelessness reform, as are models like Youth Foyers that provide young people with accommodation while connecting them with education and employment.
For young people who do become homeless, accommodation and other wraparound supports like that provided through Mission Australia's Youth Accommodation Support Service (YASS) are crucial.

YASS supports young people living in Perth who are homeless or at risk of homelessness by providing crisis accommodation for 15 to 18-year-olds, and transitional accommodation to young people aged 16 to 25 for up to 12 months in two transitional onsite units. Young people may then be referred to longer-term-accommodation. YASS provides 24-hour care and case management, presenting an opportunity for clients to address their homelessness, mental health, alcohol and other drug, relationships, education and employment and build independent living skills.

Dixie Bonney is a young Wongi and Yamatji woman who was recently assisted by YASS. Dixie and her mum were displaced from their home in January 2020. After living



Barran, by Rusty Peters, from the cover of the 2012 Responding to Homelessness in Western Australia edition of *Parity*

with her auntie for a few months, she needed to find a more suitable place to live, particularly while studying Year 12. She connected with YASS and in mid-March she moved into the crisis accommodation for young people, about a week before COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns were put into place.

Dixie was able to continue to work with her case worker, Kelly, to achieve her goals, with a particular goal to find a more independent place to live. After a short while Dixie was able to move into the transitional accommodation onsite at YASS, and after working closely with YASS and Mission Australia's Housing Support Services found a Department of Housing property to call her own.

> ' [Connecting with YASS and Housing Support Services is] *one of the best things I've done in my life. It's been really good to have somewhere to stay, get support and having independence is really important.'*
>
> — Dixie Bonney

Learning to live independently during COVID was a huge challenge, with Dixie experiencing mixed emotions. While she enjoyed living by herself, she missed seeing friends and having the freedom to go anywhere, while at the same time trying to balance the stress of studying for Year 12, which she successfully completed at the end of 2020.

Dixie now has a full-time fly-in-fly-out job, has just moved into her own private rental accommodation and has saved a deposit for a house.

> *'At the moment* [work] *takes up a lot of my time, but that is kind of adding to my dream of owning a house one day. I've never really had anywhere stable to live and my mum never owned a place and I never really knew much about my dad's situation. Something I really want, is to own a house so I know my kids and my grandkids, eventually, will have somewhere that they know is going to be home.'*[3]
>
> — Dixie Bonney

Dixie's wonderful story shows what young people can achieve when they are able to access the right support at the right time — but this is by no means a given at present. In the last 12 months, YASS received 418 queries, and of these was able to accommodate 51 people. This reflects the same shortage of funding and resources seen by others in the sector, where demand too often outstrips supply.

Addressing youth homelessness is a critical issue, in WA and across the country. Further investment in service delivery, including transitional responses, prevention and early intervention approaches and models that link young people to education and employment, are necessary to ensure the wellbeing and social and economic participation of young people. Leadership is needed from governments at all levels, alongside the community sector and young people with lived experience, in the development of a national plan to end homelessness that includes activities and targets for ending youth homelessness. Long-term solutions also rely on an adequate supply of social and affordable housing, and government and private investment are both needed to address the national shortfall.

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Ending Youth Homelessness in Western Australia: A Targeted Approach to Systemic Reform

Stefaan Bruce-Truglio, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia and Chrissie Smith, Executive Manager of Specialist Community Services, Vinnies Western Australia

The efforts to end homelessness have left young people behind.

Over the last few years, Western Australia (WA) has seen a strong, coordinated strategic focus on ending homelessness, with State Government and the community-led WA Alliance to End Homelessness both releasing 10-year strategies demonstrating a whole-of-community approach to ending homelessness. Although the recent shift to respond to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted progress somewhat, there is still a feeling that we have an unparalleled opportunity to end youth homelessness, as key levers and stakeholders in areas of governance and service delivery have been galvanised in a way that has never occurred before.

Beneath the optimism there has been a distinct lack of focus on young people in WA's plan for reform so far. Despite being identified as a priority cohort in both strategies, investment so far in key initiatives such as implementing a 'No Wrong Door' approach, a low-barrier response and a Housing First system, have largely been allocated to adult-focused initiatives, with young people incorporated within these, therefore failing to provide targeted and distinct policy response and robust investment into addressing the root causes of youth homelessness.

While these priority areas are well-regarded as ambitious areas of systemic reform, in order to ensure their success in intervening early to prevent entrenched chronic homelessness, they must be adapted to the unique needs of young people and tailored to address the distinct and complex pathways that lead to youth homelessness.

The Need for a Specialist Approach to Youth Homelessness

It is well-documented that young people are a cohort that experience high rates of homelessness, with those aged 12 to 25 making up 21 per cent of the entire homeless population in Western Australia.[1]

This figure is likely an under-representation as homelessness among young people is often under-reported due to a tendency for young people to be staying in short-term or temporary accommodation such as couch-surfing. Often for these young people, a usual address will be reported and so they will not be counted on the census as homeless, despite them often experiencing unstable financial and living circumstances.[2]

It is essential that any approach to ending homelessness targets young people as a key cohort and prioritises initiatives that attempt to intervene and break the cycle of homelessness as early as possible. If we simply focus on those who are already entrenched in chronic rough sleeping, we will fail to disrupt the pathways that cause individuals to be homeless early in life.

Any response to homelessness that does not do this, risks causing lasting negative consequences for a new generation of chronic rough sleepers. Homelessness itself is considered a form of trauma, with a strong interdependent relationship with mental health, employment, connection, and wellbeing.[3]

The reality of access to social housing for young people within the current system is often delivered without choice of a home that meets their specific needs, as well as significant preconditions to maintain a stable residence alongside insufficient support. This diminishes the capacity of a young person to feel safe and secure within their tenancy. It is clear from state and international evidence that alternative accommodation options that acknowledge a right to housing without preconditions, such as the Low-Threshold and Change approach, are integral to the success of youth transitioning into adulthood.[4]

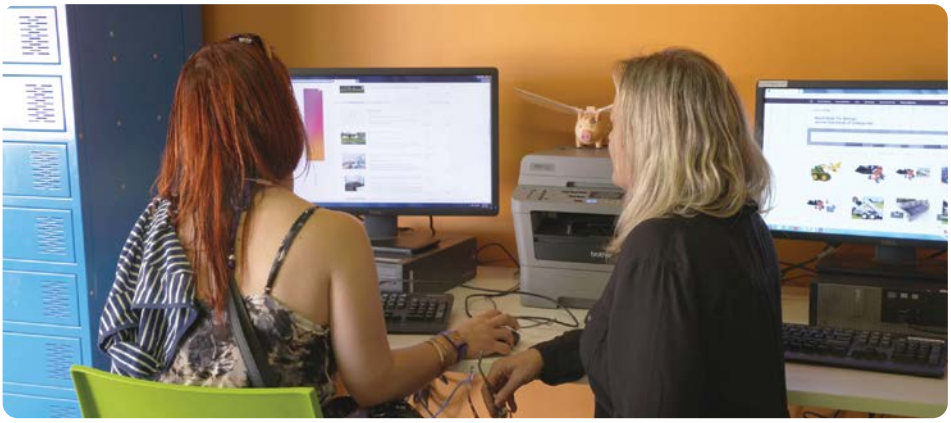
> *'...it tends to be when someone gets an offer of housing, everyone's like, 'Yes, take it. Let's do it. Let's make it work.' I think that's always the thing with Housing First is sometimes it's like let's just give them the house. But I do think some consideration has to be given to the person going into that house.'*
>
> — Youth Service[5]

Housing First for Youth: An International Blueprint for Early Intervention

The current focus on implementing a Housing First system in Western Australia is a clear example where a specialised approach for young people has not occurred. Instead, existing reform and investment has attempted to incorporate the needs of young people into a broader adult-focused model.

Research indicates that the causes and conditions of Youth Homelessness are distinct from adults and as a result, adaptations to the model are required that incorporate the changing developmental needs of young people.[6]

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is an internationally developed approach which adapts this broader Housing First model by acknowledging and addressing the distinct causes and conditions of youth homelessness.



There is a growing body of international evidence which demonstrates that young people receive fewer positive outcomes from a traditional Housing First models as opposed to adults. As a result, modification of the model is required to better meet their needs.

The Canadian HF4Y Program Model Guide articulates both the philosophy behind HF4Y and its key differences from Housing First. It is a key document which provides a comprehensive blueprint for implementing HF4Y successfully.

A key distinction that sets HF4Y apart as a specialist model, is that its goal is not simply to provide an individual with housing stability, but instead to support a young person with the holistic intensive services required to assist them to achieve their goals and facilitate a healthy transition into adulthood.[7]

The HF4Y principles, as stated within the Canadian Model, align with the Low Threshold and Change approach as a critical element for HF4Y to be successful for young people experiencing homelessness.

Building on Strengths and Expertise of Youth Homelessness Services in WA: Case study on Vinnies WA's Passages Youth Engagement Hubs

They are many examples of existing specialist youth homelessness services in WA that currently apply many HF4Y principles into their support of young people. They include Vinnies WA's Passages Youth Engagement Hubs (Passages) which were established more than 20 years ago due to growing youth homelessness and the need for a unique specialist engagement service.

Passages is a joint venture between Vinnies WA and the Rotary Club of Perth and Mandurah. The two hub locations offer a safe, friendly and non-judgemental space to access support and referrals for marginalised and at-risk young people aged 12 to 25.

Like other homelessness services provided by Vinnies WA, Passages operates using a Low Threshold and Change approach. It does not require referrals or exclude individuals on the basis of behaviours of concern, such as drug use or criminal activity. The service provides basic needs such as food, showers, laundry facilities and access to the internet as well as a range of specialised support services. Within the Hubs, Passages staff, who are all professional youth workers, prioritise building relationships with young people through informal conversations about their support needs. This may also mean helping them access specialised in-reach services at Passages or referring them to external support services.

In the 2020–21 financial year, Vinnies WA recorded 1,477 new and existing clients at the Hubs, with 5,477 total visits by clients to the two facilities. Over 700 referrals were provided for additional support services, which clients accessed at Passages on more than 33,000 occasions. These services included legal, medical, alcohol and drug support, Centrelink and financial support.

Passages provides essential and targeted services for young people as part of a bigger system. Due to their complex needs, these young people are shut out of many housing options. A statewide commitment to Housing First for Youth using a Low Threshold and Change approach could prove to be a real game-changer. If coordinated action and investment is delivered to address youth homelessness, there are many existing services that could be rapidly deployed and upskilled to deliver HF4Y.

Conclusion

Learnings from the experiences of young people in existing Housing First programs, such as the 50 Lives 50 Homes project in Western Australia[8] and international HF4Y programs like the Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot in Edinburgh Scotland,[9] have highlighted a number of critical success factors and challenges in tailoring Housing First to the needs of young people.

The growing international evidence-base points to the effectiveness of HF4Y. In WA, the current efforts to provide a strategic approach to ending homelessness cannot leave young people behind. It is time for the WA Government to urgently invest significant funding into H4FY and to utilise and build on the knowledge and expertise of youth specialist services to break the cycle of homelessness for young people and effectively end long-term chronic homelessness in WA.

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Reducing Hospital Discharges Back into Homelessness

Jake Turvey and Isaac Wood, School of Population and Global Health, The University of Western Australia (UWA), Lisa Wood, Professor, Institute for Health Research, University of Notre Dame, Amanda Stafford, Clinical Lead, Royal Perth Hospital Homeless Team

Introduction

There are increasing calls in Australia to prevent exits into homelessness from government institutions, particularly hospitals and prisons. The recently published Australian Productivity Commission Mental Health Inquiry Report recommended that:

The cycling of people in and out of hospital at great personal cost and cost to taxpayers, should be addressed. Emergency departments — or alternatives — should be adapted to work for those experiencing mental illness, *and hospital discharges into homelessness should be avoided*.[1]

The recent Victorian Royal Commission on Mental Health made a similar recommendation.[2]

Reducing hospital discharge back into homelessness is one of the core objectives of the Royal Perth Hospital (RPH) Homeless Team and in this article we describe some of the strategies used to achieve this. This draws on data collated by the team and the ongoing evaluation of the RPH Homeless Team being undertaken by the University of Western Australia (UWA) Home2Health team.

About the RPH Homeless Team

As an inner-city hospital, RPH sees a large proportion of Perth's homeless community, especially those who are street present. The

RPH Homeless Team commenced in June of 2016, based on the United Kingdom (UK) Pathway model now present in almost a dozen hospitals throughout England.[3] The RPH Homeless team is a partnership between the hospital and Homeless Healthcare GP practice, WA's largest provider of primary care to people who are homeless. The core element of the team's work is hospital in-reach from General Practitioners (GPs), nurses, and case workers. They bring a strong focus on person-centred care plus connecting people to accommodation, housing, primary care, and other community supports. The RPH Homeless Team also seeks to provide advocacy for homeless patients and facilitates better discharge planning and patient follow-up.

Housing and Homelessness Situation of People Seen by the RPH Homeless Team

The patient population seen by the RPH Homeless Team (mid 2016–end 2020) is highly marginalised, with 71.8 per cent being rough sleepers (sleeping on streets, in parks, or in cars — see Figure 1). A further 7.6 per cent were staying with family or friends, often couch surfing. A small proportion of patients seen by the Homeless Team (7.9 per cent) were previously homeless but now in long-term housing and were ongoing patients of HHC GP practice.

Strategies to Prevent Discharge into Homelessness

There is overwhelming evidence about the importance of safe and secure shelter in achieving and sustaining good health. For patients experiencing homelessness, this is particularly crucial given the overwhelming levels of multi-morbidity experienced amongst this cohort[4] and the added difficulty of effectively recovering while sleeping rough in unsuitable conditions on the street. Securing safe and appropriate accommodation upon discharge is therefore vital for continued recovery and serves as an opportunity to connect to long-term support.

The Homeless Team's caseworkers and peer worker achieve this by:

Investigating short-term refuges and other crisis housing options such as Tom Fisher House (rough sleeper respite).

Utilising brokerage funds to pay for nights in short-term accommodation such as backpackers, hostels, budget motels.

Supporting people with accommodation applications, and priority listing for public housing.

Addressing barriers to housing and accomodation such as lack of ID documents, contact information,, identifying supports needs.

Figure 2: How RPH Homeless Team connect people to accommodation

Early collaborative discharge planning and enhanced care co-ordination for patients experiencing homelessness is important in securing accommodation upon discharge, but in practice this is heavily impacted by the availability of suitable short-term accommodation and the current shortage of public housing options or private rentals in metropolitan Perth and wider Western Australia.

For the RPH Homeless Team, access to brokerage funding has been vital for securing short-term accommodation and other incidentals for patients experiencing homelessness to avert their discharge back to the street or to unsafe accommodation. This has been possible via funds over the last four years from the Homeless Discharge Facilitation Fund Project funded by the WA Department of Health. The brokerage funds have been used predominantly for short-term accommodation (86 per cent of funds in 2020),[5] but also train tickets and flights to return people to where they come from. Bus or taxi vouchers ensure patients reach accommodation safely.

Have Discharges to the Street Been Prevented?

The ability to discharge patients into accommodation can act as a critical circuit breaker to recurrent ED hospital attendance, and provides an important 'stepping stone' between hospital discharge and connection to longer-term support services and accommodation.

Overall 72 per cent of homeless patients were rough sleeping on first contact with the Homeless Team (Figure 1) in the 2019–2020 period but only 32.8 per cent of episodes of care resulted in discharge back to rough sleeping.

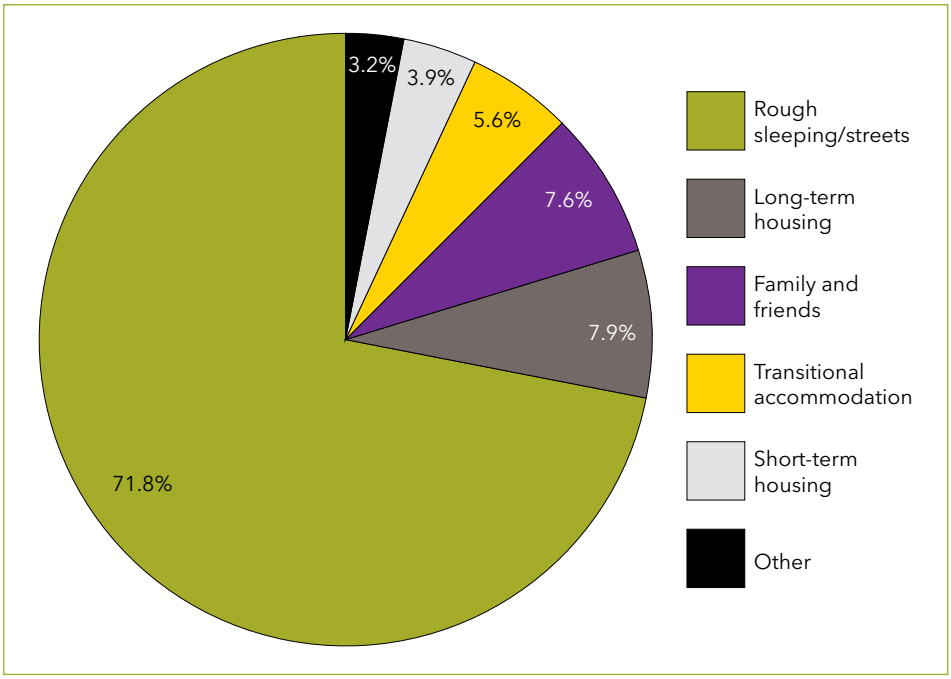

Figure 1: Housing situation of patients when first seen by RPH Homeless Team (mid 2016–2020)

More than half of these discharges to the street due to the lack of an accommodation option.[6] Over the same two-year period, short-term accommodation such as backpacker hostels, motels, and crisis accommodation were the most common discharge locations for patients supported by the Homeless Team (26.8 per cent).[7] Supporting people to negotiate a place to stay with family or friends was also common (11.2 per cent of discharges), followed by transitional accommodation (4.9 per cent).

> *A patient didn't have any money to pay for accommodation and was looking for employment. This was affecting their mental health and triggering suicidal thoughts. RPH Homeless Team facilitated and funded accommodation for sufficient time to allow the patient to be safely discharged, and while supported, found employment to fund his own accommodation.*
>
> — RPH Staff Member

Case Study

Background

Brian* is a 60-year-old male who had been sleeping rough for 12 months after estrangement from his family. This led to a deterioration in his mental health and heavy drinking. Over a 14-month period Brian presented to ED 13 times for mental health, cardiac and alcohol related issues, and had 15 hospital inpatient days. The cost to the health system equated to over $52,000.[12]

Support provided

The RPH Homeless Team first met with Brian in the ED and supported him during a subsequent inpatient admission. They worked collaboratively with ED staff, a hospital psychologist and the RPH Alcohol Other Drug (AOD) team to ensure a solid transition plan from hospital that connected Brian with community and support services. On discharge, brokerage funds were used to secure Brian a few nights of accommodation at a budget hotel where he was visited by A Homeless Healthcare GP and support worker and assisted Brian with referrals to Next Step to assist with his management of alcohol cravings, and to a men's accommodation Lodge.

Current situation

Brian continues to see a Homeless Healthcare GP and Next Step.
He is now residing in supported accommodation for people who have been homeless and who have mental health/AOD issues and has a case worker. Brian has not represented to hospital since.

** Name changed for anonymity*

While hospital discharges to short-term accommodation may be viewed as a 'temporary fix', our evaluation shows that such support can help to break the cycle of rough sleeping and hospital re-presentation, acting as a 'stepping stone' to longer-term support and accommodation services.[8] Between 2018 and 2020, the RPH Homeless Team provided 542 instances of brokerage support to patients experiencing homelessness, with 385 nights of short-term accommodation secured between June and December 2020 alone.[9]

Importantly, these strategies are having the intended impact on hospital presentations. To illustrate, for a subset of 88 RPH patients supported by brokerage funds in 2020, there was a 37.2 per cent decrease in ED presentations in the two months following support, compared with the two months prior, and a 35.3 per cent decrease in admitted inpatient days. Applying the average cost for WA public hospitals of an ED presentation, ($861),[10] and inpatient admission, ($2,722),[11] this equates to an estimated cost saving of almost $294,000 via reduced hospital attendances.

Intermediary accommodation options, at an average of $88 a night, cost a fraction (0.03 per cent) of the hospital bed cost and are increasingly vital given long wait times for public housing in WA (waitlist currently > 17,000 applications and ~34,000 individuals) and for suitable supported and transitional accommodation facilities over the last two years.

Conclusion

The reduction in discharges of homeless patients to the street facilitated by the RPH Homeless Team via its use of brokerage funds is important and significant. However, the most effective intervention for improving the health of the rough sleeping population is rapid access to long-term housing coupled with individually tailored wrap-around support. Given our inability to provide these in current situation of dire shortages of social housing, affordable rental accommodation and supported mental health facilities, the RPH Homeless Team model and brokerage strategy offers a practical intervention to reduce hospital discharges to homelessness and improve connection to community homelessness services.

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Library Connect: Early Intervention to Prevent Homelessness

Donna Quinn, The University of Western Australia,
Traci Cascioli, St Patrick's Community Support Centre,
Sonia Gonzalez, St Patrick's Community Support Centre

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated community hardship in many ways, even in Western Australia where COVID-19 spread has to date been minimal. There has been an increase in people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness due to financial hardship, employment impacts, and the dearth of affordable rentals and public housing. This has included an emergence of many people requiring support who might not have previously accessed community services.[1,2]

Against this backdrop of changing and increasing community need, the City of Fremantle and St Patrick's Community Support Centre (St Pat's) initiated the Library Connect project; embedding a qualified and experienced community support worker within the accessible, safe, and welcoming space of a public library.

Library Connect, when it began, was the second library-based initiative of its kind in Australia, and is partly based on the support service implemented in City of Melbourne's libraries[3] in partnership with Launch Housing and the City of Melbourne.

Across North America by contrast, there are over a hundred public libraries which have library-based social workers or social work student placement programs, as well as library-based peer outreach workers and peer navigators — people with a range of lived experience, who are based in libraries to provide support.[4,5,6,7,8]

Research in the United States has highlighted that *'As a free public space, the library is visited daily by people experiencing homelessness seeking daytime shelter, bathrooms, internet access, and safety from the streets.'*[9]

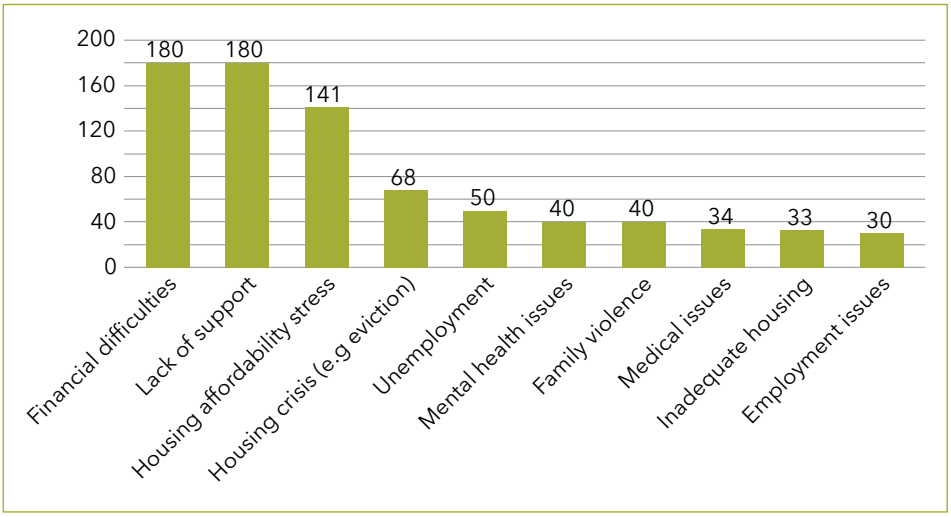
The Fremantle Library Connect program was initially launched as a one-year pilot in September 2020, and has recently received funding towards another three years. The project is being evaluated by the Home2Health team at The University of Western Australia.

Support Provided to Date

In the first 12 months of the project, there were 556 total recorded contacts. Two-thirds of the requests for support have been from women, and the service supported significant numbers of Aboriginal people and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) backgrounds.

Who has Library Connect Supported?
556 total recorded contacts
67 per cent female 33 per cent male
23 per cent Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander
19 per cent born overseas

The most common issues experienced by people supported by Library Connect have included financial difficulties, housing affordability stress and crisis, and lack of support to manage these issues. Issues relating to mental health, family violence, and employment were also common. People often present with and receive support around multiple intersecting issues.



Main Presenting Issues (year 1)

Critical Success Factors

Five key critical success factors have emerged from the project evaluation to date and data gathered from interviews with people who have been supported through Library Connect, as well as interviews, focus groups, and a survey at two time points of library staff and key project stakeholders.

1. **Libraries are a Safe Space**
2. **Early Intervention and Prevention**
3. **Partnership Model**
4. **Support & Capacity Building for Library Staff**
5. **No barriers to Support**

1. Libraries are a Safe Space

Libraries are a *safe, neutral, and familiar space* in which to seek help. This *increases accessibility* of the service and reduces stigma and anxiety about seeking support, especially for people accessing support for the first time.

> *'They feel it's a safe space for them to come — not judgemental, not dangerous, friendly, supportive. I think women can sometimes feel a bit overwhelmed by men's presence, so they prefer coming here because they feel safe here. They come to take some books and stuff, but also to receive some support'*
>
> — Library Connect worker

Libraries are also a particularly welcoming and accessible location for families, which can make engaging with support less daunting.

> *'And the Library is a good place for me. And for kids, the Library is the best place. When in the Library, they're having toys there, they're having books, they're having storytime'*
>
> — Library Connect client

2. Early Intervention and Prevention

The Library Connect service provides *early intervention* before issues escalate, particularly for people who have not previously needed support or who may not be comfortable accessing traditional emergency relief or crisis services.

In many instances, Library Connect has provided *critical support for families* — through securing housing, ensuring safety, and supporting school attendance — which has prevented further crisis.

> *'You don't know what to do, you don't know where to start* [the Library Connect worker] *really did help me. I have a job, I have my life set, and then something happened. Domestic violence was going on for a while. I just needed to get out. I left everything, I literally started from scratch'*
>
> — Library Connect client

3. Partnership Model

The *partnership* between a local government (City of Fremantle) and a community sector organisation (St Pat's) is considered by project partners to be critical to the Library Connect model.

> ' [The Library Connect worker's] *access to St Pat's information is really valuable. The fact that she's got St Pat's because from a therapeutic point of view … she needs brainstorming and supervision from a therapeutic agency'*
>
> — Focus group participant

4. Support and Capacity Building for Library Staff

Library Connect provides *support and capacity building for library staff* — by having the Library Connect worker on site, with the time, skills, and training to support library staff with *managing and debriefing* on issues or incidents.

> ' [The Library Connect worker] *has done work with some of the people who might be a little bit trickier than others. She has the time to sit with … people sometimes and just go, "Look, if you want to be in the library space, you have to be more like this," and it helped them build those skills'*
>
> — Focus group participant

A specific area of focus has been the development of *trauma informed practice* within the Library. The Library Connect worker has arranged trauma informed training for library staff, and supports library staff in understanding the link between *trauma and client behaviour*.

> *'Sometimes if they have more of an understanding of what someone was dealing with in their life, I don't think they would escalate things as quickly as they do. We've been trying to go out a lot more and talk to people instead of security intervening because we find that less things will escalate and result in "You're banned from the library"'*
>
> — Focus group participant

5. No Barriers to Support

Library Connect offers very flexible support, with *no specific limits* to the number of sessions or length of support which can be offered. Clients can get in contact directly when they

From left to right: Jayne Cleave (City of Fremantle), Andrew Sullivan (City of Fremantle), Sonia Gonzalez (St Pat's), Michael Piu (St Pat's), Michelle Brennand (City of Fremantle)

need support, *without complicated referral processes* or having to tell their story to multiple people.

> *'I know that I can contact (Library Connect worker) if I have any problem, I can email her and she gets back to me and lets me know how I can go or what time I can come and see her about it'*
>
> — Library Connect client

> *'There are a lot of services but sometimes they can't receive as much help as they need. Maybe once every three months, they can see someone … whereas here, they can come any time. I always say "Make an appointment but feel free to drop in. If I'm free, I'm happy to have a chat."'*
>
> — Library Connect worker

Library Connect does not have *specific eligibility criteria* — for age, gender, income, family and/or relationship status, and residency or visa status. Library Connect supports a *very diverse range of clients* and many clients engaging with Library Connect have not been able to access other services due to these services' eligibility criteria or availability.

To Conclude

In its first year, the project has demonstrated how earlier intervention to prevent homelessness and address hardship can be effectively embedded into a local library setting. There has been significant interest from other local governments about the possibility of this model of support being offered in libraries elsewhere in Western Australia.

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Case Study

Background

Mary, a woman in her late twenties, engaged with Library Connect in November 2020, after coming to WA with her four-year-old son, escaping domestic violence. Mary had arrived in Perth at a time of significant housing crisis — with very high demand and low vacancy rates for rental properties, and high waiting lists for crisis accommodation. She had not previously engaged with community services and had very limited knowledge of available support.

Library Connect support

Library Connect supported Mary with referrals, finding housing, employment, emotional support, emergency relief, and accessing Centrelink.

Current situation

When the Library Connect worker followed up with Mary in September 2021, Mary advised that she was living in the same private rental accommodation and managing well. Mary knows that she can access further support through Library Connect if she needs to in the future.

Debra Zanella

Chief Executive Officer, Ruah Community Services

Ruah is a Western Australian non-government organisation that provides comprehensive care for those experiencing homelessness, family violence and mental health. The following piece is a reflection on the impact of housing shortages on the relationship between client and service staff. This article was first published in The West Australian.

The Ruah Centre in Northbridge is the place where the founders of Ruah opened Perth's first soup kitchen for people experiencing homelessness more than 60 years ago and where a team of very dedicated people still commit themselves to working with people experiencing homelessness.

It is the place where one of our very experienced Community Workers wrote to me with a raw honesty that shows how even the strongest service providers are juggling and struggling steeling themselves for a tide of demand they are powerless to hold back.

This particular Community Worker is no longer with Ruah but her words stay with us, as our teams struggle with increasing demand and limited housing supply, as a reminder to us all of how difficult these times are.

Her words are more powerful than anything I could say.

After a fairly quiet start to the year the vibe at the Centre has become as hectic and racy as it's ever been. This is good. I've always enjoyed working in this crazy environment with busy and full days. I love to go home tired, with a sense of accomplishment.

However, I'm becoming increasingly anxious, overwhelmed and even despairing for the wellbeing of clients (and workers) due to the ever-diminishing availability of accommodation options. Over the past couple of years, the existing crisis and transitional accommodation services have all tightened their entry criteria to exclude clients presenting with AOD (alcohol and drug) issues and untreated mental health issues.

While this is understandable given the lack of skilled staff and funding we all deal with, it's also devastating for Ruah Centre clients and workers – those two things are the main causes of homelessness. It means that we are essentially unable to help the majority of clients who request accommodation support.

As a worker, this forces us to get really creative, and/or do a lot of begging and pleading in the desperate hope that once the service meets the client in person, they will feel more kindly towards the referral. It can be stressful and draining, but we've soldiered on!

More recently those accommodation services have fewer and fewer vacancies, and many are no longer even taking referrals at this time. Every day we see new clients who are in crisis and newly homeless. In the past, we could usually help these very motivated clients. But now, we have to turn away even these 'easy' clients — to put them out on the streets.

Every day I am submitting multiple referrals that I know are going nowhere and are a waste of time… giving them false hope. As you can imagine, this is heartbreaking and has a very bad effect on how you see yourself as a worker. My stomach

clenches every time a person comes to me with hope and trust in their eyes because I know I am going to let them down. Person after person, day after day. This is what wears you down, this is what makes it hard to get dressed for work and into the car every morning. This is what causes burn out.

I love our clients. I deeply believe in the healing power of relationships, and I have pride in my ability to build solid relationships with clients over time. I thrive on the rewarding feeling of our homeless community knowing me, trusting me, relying on me. To see the distrust creeping into their eyes, and to be the person who ends up confirming their deeply ingrained belief that the system doesn't really care is nothing less than devastating to a worker who genuinely cares.

To be the person who has to tell a waiting client that all the work we have done together today has failed and all I can offer them is a blanket (and frequently not even that) …well, it's hard. It's hard to do it once, or twice. But to do it multiple times a day, day after day?

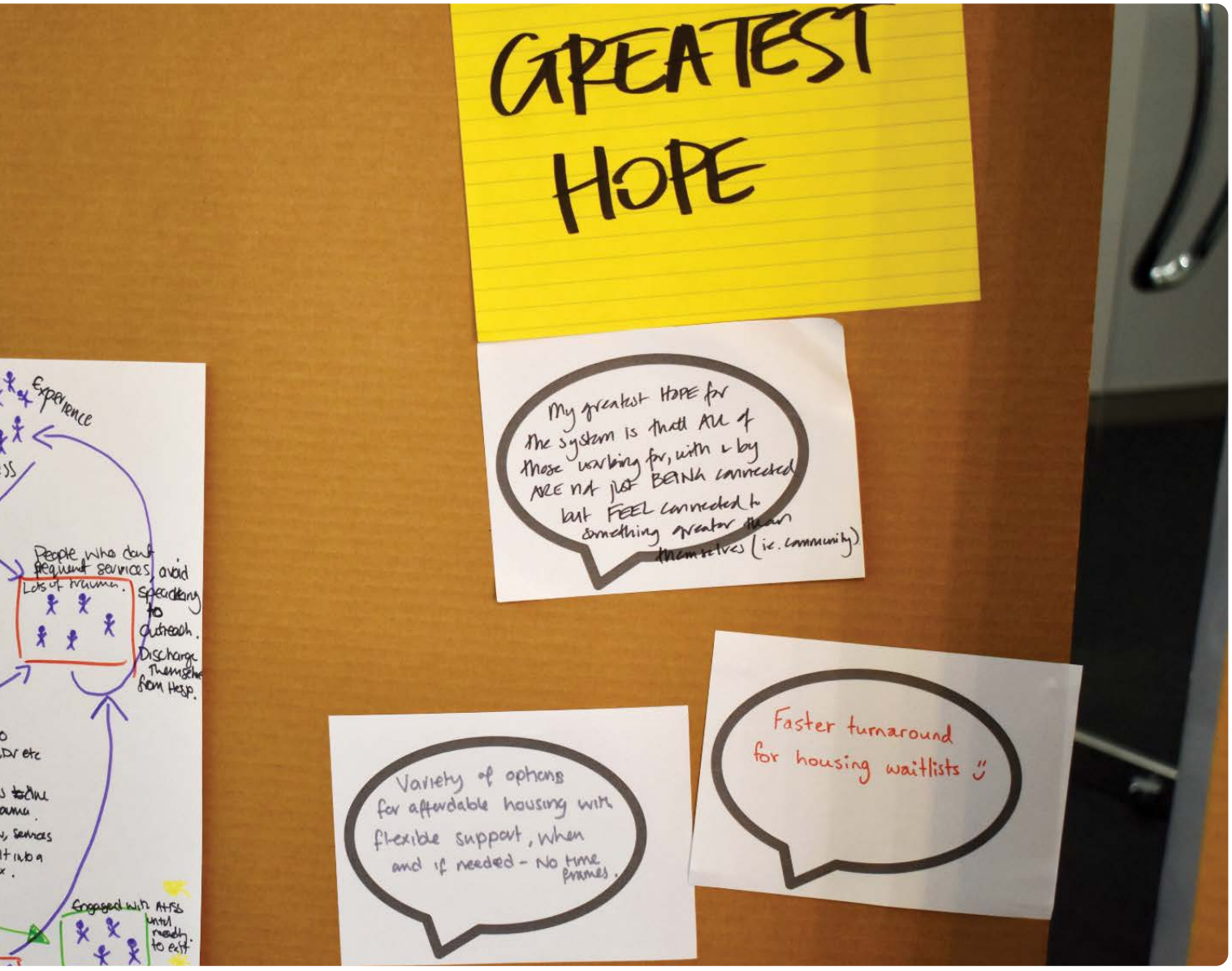
To add insult to injury, as you know, there is currently a 'code yellow' in the hospital system (sounds fairly benign doesn't it). It's always a constant fight to obtain mental health support for homeless clients. We are used to that. Right now, we are being told up front; 'don't even bother trying'. It's one thing to put a newly homeless client on the street with a thin blanket and some two-minute noodles. It's another to do that to someone who is suicidal. But it's a daily reality at the moment.

Further, the moratorium against evictions is about to be lifted, private rental prices have shot up sky high again, and for every private rental there are 30, 40, 50 applicants. Where are we going to find ourselves in a few weeks' time?

We also have no casual staff at the moment to cover Centre staff if they need to take a day off. So there is no relief to this grinding pressure, and we are often short-staffed. I'm not trying to alarm you, I'm really not. I still want to turn up, I still love the clients, I still yearn to help people. I only want to paint a picture for you of how things are, literally on the ground, in homelessness at the moment.

As you have noticed, I fight. I fight for our clients, and for all disadvantaged people. I relate to them and connect with them much more easily than I do to 'mainstream' people in comfortable offices who go home to comfortable homes.

Anyway, that's where we are at these days, in case you needed any extra motivation to keep fighting for more accommodation and support services.



Opinion 2

Leanne Strommen

General Manager Community Services of Centrecare Inc

Let's Do This

I have a 35-year history of working within the social services sector. My role is General Manager Community Services of Centrecare Inc, a values-based, outcomes focused organisation that is dedicated to people making time for people and respect for human dignity. We deliver a diverse range of social services to the West Australian community. Our services include counselling services, homelessness and housing support services, adult and youth justice services, family dispute resolution services, child contact services, gambling prevention support, settlement services, intensive family support, child parent centres, mental health support services, family support networks, youth services and family and domestic violence prevention services.

I am also an individual, work colleague, mother, aunty, cousin, nana, sister, daughter, neighbour, private person, public person and community member. In common with many families, within my blended and extended family we have experience of family violence, disability, mental health issues, separation, and homelessness. I was born in Northampton Western Australia and grew up in a single parent household in Geraldton living in public housing but have lived in Perth most of my adult life. I have two dogs, live with extended family, and have a safe place to call home.

A place to live or a home is not currently available to everyone in our community. There are many people who don't have a place to live or who are a risk of losing their homes. Some sleep on the streets, in cars, with family, friends, crisis accommodation, refuges and in supported accommodation. Anyone can become homeless. It only takes a change of circumstance or a life event, such as a war, a pandemic, family and domestic violence, health issues, a loss of employment, or death of a carer partner. If you are a child who is dependent on their parents or adult carers you have no choice but to travel into homelessness and poverty with your parent/carer.

I have worked with people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness for 28 years in a direct capacity or overseeing service delivery, within the social services sector with other similar organisations, peak organisations and with governments. Everyone is working and reaching out to people experiencing homelessness, trying to prevent it, advocating, changing what we do, reforming, changing strategies, building housing — but people are still homeless and/or becoming homeless. The lack of adequate income and social assistance creating the ongoing environment of people living in poverty. There simply isn't enough housing, social assistance, or support options to meet the current demand of people who need to have an affordable home in our state.

Homelessness can be generational or once off, cyclic or living on the edge throughout one's life. More people are entering into homelessness right now. Lived experienced maybe just around the corner for any of us. The trauma and risk this creates for children, young families and individuals can be lifelong and generational. This is not saying that effort and funding have not been put in over the years. I know there has been ongoing funding, different strategies, road maps, reforms and the right intentions — but people are still homeless and living in poverty. We have to work together with people impacted by homelessness, and we have to source more long-term accommodation options going forward. We can change this. We have to change this. And there has to be more housing made available.

As individuals, professionals, organisations, community members and government we must work together to ensure:

- An end to homelessness of young people, children, families, and individuals within our state.
- Housing and a place to call home is a basic human right.
- Valuing, safe-guarding, and protecting all children and young people and their rights are at the forefront of all our decision making.
- People from all cultures, backgrounds and economic circumstances have equal access to community and social services.

- Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original custodians of our land and addressing the barriers that they face as individuals, families, communities, and organisations to access housing and uphold culturally appropriate led services.

- Domestic and family violence is unacceptable at any level and should not lead to homelessness.

- An increase social assistance and financial benefits to support people out of poverty and homelessness.

- That the social services sector remains central to the future wellbeing of our community in partnership with the people who need our services and in partnership with government.

- Working collaboratively together within the community to support the people and the communities we all serve.

The opening of our borders is coming soon, and we have to act now to solve the current homelessness crisis and prevent increasing numbers of people becoming homeless in the future. While COVID-19 has created major disruption and pain to our lives throughout the world it has also created a time for reflection, time to re-evaluate our values, an opportunity to rebalance and focus on what we believe is most important. It has shown many things we have held important are not as important as others and we can do many things differently.

However, we cannot totally dismiss past efforts and experience as doing so would demonstrate that we have not actually learned from our past. New ideas and new ways are built on our history and experience. Much of what we currently do still works — there just isn't enough of it. When I look back over that period of time, while there are moments or situations I would have responded to very differently if faced with them again overall, we all adapted rapidly, let go of what previously may have seemed essential, focussed on what needed to be done, and did it. It has been a time of unity, sadness, disbelief, disunity, new learnings, transforming how we live and work together in very difficult time in our history.

I am really proud of not just what I was able to achieve, but also of what many others did all within Centrecare, the community services sector, government, local governments, within my family and the community, have done. We have been very lucky from the outset that amongst the early chaos of COVID-19, came strong leadership from the Western Australian Government and our West Australian community. We have shown what we can do where there is a will — so let's do this together and stop homelessness in our state.

Opinion 3

Michael Piu

Chief Executive Officer, St Patrick's Community Support Centre Limited

While the saying 'may you live in interesting times' is generally considered a curse, others consider it a blessing. Perhaps this contrast is an appropriate note on which to reflect on our collective work in WA, through the challenges of the pandemic, in tackling homelessness in our communities.

That the COVID-19 pandemic has been a disruptor to lives and our work would be beyond dispute. There have certainly been many serious challenges that have arisen for people facing homelessness. In early 2020, the initial national directive to 'stay at home' laid bare the realities of homelessness — the lack of capacity in the system to respond to those who are street present, the risks to those living in over-crowded housing or indeed in congregate living situations. It has exposed the huge vulnerability of people who face disadvantage, and it has compounded the pressures on the system — particularly in key areas such as housing.

However, disruption can also trigger great innovation and accelerate action. St Patrick's has been proud to work in collaboration with other stakeholders responding to homelessness to pivot our response in the face of these challenges, with a continued focus on the long-term goal of ending chronic homelessness.

One example of this has been the HEART project: Homelessness Engagement and Assessment Response Team. HEART was quickly built early in 2021 by St Patrick's in consortium with Uniting WA, Wungening Aboriginal Corporation and Ruah in response to the increasing pressures on the system from COVID and its impacts on street present homelessness. HEART provides a rapid and specialist intensive outreach service to people experiencing chronic street present homelessness across the Perth metropolitan area.

A key success factor of this unique model has been a close working partnership with the Department of Communities. Indeed, a staff member from the Department was seconded to work for St Pats to lead the project, reinforcing a trusted partnership between service providers and the Department's service delivery arm to deliver an effective and client-centred response. The model furthermore facilitates a joined-up approach across the broader system through regular meetings of all key stakeholders providing a wraparound approach to supporting clients.

Whilst responding to ongoing emerging need in terms of street present homelessness across the metropolitan area, HEART is currently working with 111 clients, along with their family members, all of whom have faced chronic street present homelessness and often have cycled through the system, including social housing, many times. Despite those circumstances, around 63 per cent have been provided accommodation so far through HEART (including being supported to return to country), which is an extraordinary achievement.

Mary,* an Aboriginal woman in her late 60s, was one such person supported by HEART. Mary had been long-term street-present homeless after years of multiple failed public housing tenancies. A number of challenges were at play for Mary including family issues, as well as alcohol and other drug and mental ill health issues. Mary was originally provided temporary hostel accommodation whilst she connected with the HEART team. She engaged well with her HEART worker, who secured access to services to help Mary address her AOD and mental ill health concerns. HEART then worked with Noongar Mia Mia to secure more appropriate accommodation in one of their properties. Whilst there, Mary did extremely well managing her tenancy, taking great pride in her unit, and had success in addressing her other challenges. Meanwhile, working with the Department of Communities, HEART was able to secure Mary a public housing tenancy. Mary reports that she is doing very well and is really happy.

Undoubtedly, we continue to face considerable challenges as we navigate the impacts of COVID and the longer-term systemic issues. However, there is cause for optimism. Recent investments by the State Government in evidence-based approaches such as Housing First and the development of new social housing provide an important starting point. As we head into 2022, we need to continue our focus on effective collaborations such as HEART, along with broader system reform which places people at the centre, rather than programs and institutions. If government and the sector genuinely commit to this approach, then there is the potential to make real inroads towards ending chronic homelessness.

*Not her real name

Opinion 4

Evan Nunn

Chief Executive Officer, Accordwest

Hit Print!!!

Australians have a boundless capacity for turning ideas into action and we have succeeded in figuring out how to solve many of the problems of our world. While we have abundant ideas about dealing with our housing shortages, we still can't seem to keep up with demand, particularly for affordable housing. Right now, during the global pandemic, labour shortages in our workforce and difficulties in accessing the supplies necessary to build homes is impacting and slowing our efforts to address the shortfall of affordable housing.

My imagination has been sparked when I read what is going on overseas with the growth in the 3D printing of housing. We know that the global 3D construction market is set to grow by 91 per cent between 2021 and 2028. It's happening in Scandinavia, Holland, Africa, Mexico and the USA and other places. This year, the Economist magazine reported that a Palari Homes and Mighty Buildings in California, the collaborators behind one design for 3D printing houses, were able to create a house in less than 24 hours. Still in the Unites States, the ICON's 3D 'version' has helped a homeless man move in to his new home. As reported in the Broadcaster, 'this story proves how the 3D-printed tiny home is more than a feat in engineering and sustainability — it's also a life-saving technology.'[1]

The story of how these organisations got to the point where they can produce housing so rapidly is fascinating. It is a story of human perseverance and ingenious minds using new tools of the trade to change the game. Like modular building before it, the ICON method sees the structure assembled from components that are prefabricated.[2]

We all want to see Australia as a fair place where we can all live safely, where we can heal, reconcile, learn, grow and mature together. My hope is that there is a new generation of people committed to affordable housing construction who can carve out a niche in the market using 3D printer technology to help meet the unquenchable demand for more social and affordable housing. We can stretch our collective imagination further and use green concrete. Holcim is already heading in this direction, or using other recycled materials. I am sure all this will be possible in the future, and I am also sure how much we need to head in this direction.

This positive future might emerge from the startup culture we have in Australia, one that values creative problem solving to adapt quickly to economic and social pressures and demands. Social entrepreneurs could play a leading role in helping marginalised and less fortunate Australians out of our current national housing crisis and prevent this crisis recurring in the future.

Personally, I look forward to seeing a bootstrap or crowdfunding campaign to fund 3D printed housing in Australia in the near future.

Wouldn't it be great to see it start on the West Coast?

HIT Print.

Endnotes

1. Homeless man becomes first inhabitant of 3D printed house. *The Broadcaster* (hhsbroadcaster.com)
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Opinion 5

Mark Glasson

Chief Executive Officer, Anglicare WA

Inside the Tent

There can be no doubt that nationally we are witnessing the collapse of our housing system. Report after report tells us that housing affordability is worsening across the nation, rental prices are soaring and that homelessness is increasing. Years of government neglect, be it State or Federal, red or blue, have landed us in this position, where the tentacles of insecure housing are reaching further and further into our community.

In March, when the pandemic inspired eviction moratorium came to an end in Western Australia and rents soared, we witnessed a flood of people losing their homes. Our housing workers really struggled when their support kits were empty, and they had nothing left to give. Vacancy rates were as low as we have seen them and housing simply became unattainable for many. As a result, families moved into overcrowded dwellings, pitched tents in the back yards of family and friends, or opted to sleep in their cars.

As time has worn on, a new group of people has emerged seeking support. This group, and there are lots of them, fearing the consequences of ending their tenancies, signed up for the increased rents. Now they find that they cannot pay the rent and afford to live. This is a group of people much broader than those we have previously seen. It includes both the waged and unwaged, people from the regions as well as Perth, people who for the first time, find themselves needing support.

For as long as government's have neglected their collective responsibility to house our community, the community housing and homelessness sectors have warned that one day a reckoning would come. In Western Australia, and I suspect nationally, this time has arrived.

So how should we respond?

It is important to recognize that the McGowan Labor Government, as have governments in other States, seen the issue and committed significant new resources to meeting the challenge. In Western Australia, there has been record investments in public housing and homelessness; 3,300 new public housing dwellings, the planned construction of two Common Ground facilities, a new Aboriginal short stay facility in the Perth CBD, and the roll-out of housing first responses across much of the state. These initiatives will bring much needed resources to the table and need to be celebrated.

However, does the role of the community sector stop with these commitments? Should we continue to advocate for more resources? How hard should we push?

In answering these questions, we need to look back.

During 2020 and early 2021 we saw the emergence of organised encampments in Perth and Fremantle. Calling for additional community housing and help for the homeless, these encampments were new to Western Australia. The most notable in Fremantle, established on Boxing Day in 2020 in a park opposite the Electorate Office of Communities Minister Simone McGurk, was about as blunt pre-election activism as you could get. While such activism had been commonplace in Sydney and Melbourne, it was new to our State and challenged both the State Government and the sector.

The question remains, did it work?

'Tent City' remains a divisive issue in Western Australia. On the one hand, it was seen as the work of trouble making anarchists, and on the other hand, it was seen as a vital catalyst in drawing public attention and resources to an issue that was in need of a heightened focus. Either could be true, and in parts, both probably are. Nevertheless, the whole episode raised important questions for the sector about our approach to advocacy; should we influence government solely from inside the tent? Will this limit or hinder our objectives or maximise the opportunity to achieve them? In what circumstances do we need to step out? How as a sector do we genuinely enable people with lived experience to have a platform, a voice and their own agency to organise and drive their agenda for meaningful change? Can this be done this free from exploitation or harm, or without allegations of the same which in turn diminishes the voice?

We need to carefully unpack these questions about our advocacy work as we face our current housing dilemma.

The 2021 Western Australian election saw a victory so sweeping that you will find no-one that believes the McGowan Government will be in place for anything less than the next seven years.

By then, the full implementation of Western Australia's current commitments to additional social housing should be met and there will be another 3,300 properties available. Yet at the time of writing, the waiting list for social housing in this State has grown to more than 18,000, this representing more than 30,000 people in need. The new housing, while very welcome, will unfortunately, barely touch the sides.

Social housing is a shared Commonwealth and State responsibility. There is no sign that either of the major parties, are prepared to adopt the policies that would address the structural causes of our housing problems. Without genuine reform, and a much bigger contribution to social housing from all spheres of government, homelessness will inevitably continue to grow.

For many years, there has been a great deal of research undertaken and data collected that clearly demonstrate why we need to make changes to housing policy and suggesting what these should be. There have been campaigns and strategies aimed at increasing public awareness and influencing parties to develop the political will to tackle the housing crisis. Yet pretty universally our response to housing issues during the pandemic has been to activate rebates and concessions, things that we know will only make housing affordability worse.

Record investments in social housing are welcomed, and they are important step in the right direction. However, our current focus on rough sleepers will only ever provide the 'ambulance at the bottom of the cliff'. Much more needs to be done to stem the flow resulting from growing disadvantage. This will require advocacy. Strong advocacy that might require us to leave the tent for a while.

Street to Street Art Exhibition

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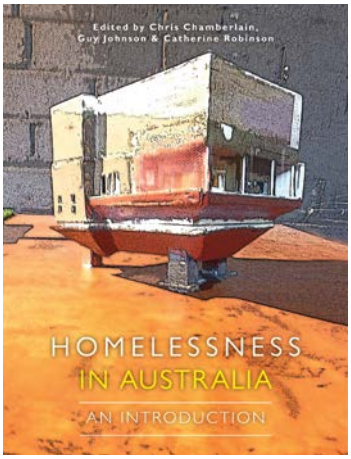
Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction



Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction provides thought-provoking, up-to-date information about the characteristics of the homeless population and contemporary policy debates.

Leading researchers and advocates from across Australia have come together to contribute their expertise and experience to produce a foundational resource that will set the benchmark for the future analysis of homelessness. Editors, Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson are all recognised experts in the field.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction is published by New South Press in association with the Victorian Council to Homeless Persons, one of Australia's leading peak homelessness advocacy bodies.

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction contains 14 chapters.

Part 1 includes: an essay on homelessness policy from the start of the nineteenth century to recent times; a chapter measuring mobility in and out of the homeless population and a piece on the causes of homelessness.

Part 2 is about contemporary policy issues and discussions. It has chapters on: the debate about definition and counting; gender and homelessness; young people; older people; Indigenous homelessness; domestic and family violence; people with complex needs and the justice system; trauma as both a cause and consequence of homelessness; and people who are long-term or 'chronically' homeless.

Part 3 includes a piece on the 'failure of the housing system' and a chapter on 'reforming the service system'.

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