

parity

NOVEMBER 2017 VOLUME 30 – ISSUE 9
ISSN 1032-6170



Responding to Homelessness in Queensland



Contents

Council to Homeless Persons

Jenny Smith	Chief Executive Officer
Kate Colvin	Manager — Policy and Communications
Ian Gough	Manager — Consumer Programs
Nich Rogers	Transition Planning Coordinator
Andrew Edgar	Capacity Building Officer
Lynette Deakes	Office Manager
Noel Murray	Parity Editor
Lanie Harris	Communications Coordinator
Belinda Lack	Digital Communications Officer
Angela Kyriakopoulos	HAS Coordinator
Cassandra Bawden	Peer Education and Support Program Team Leader
Trish Westmore	Capacity Building Coordinator
Damien Patterson	Policy and Advocacy Officer
Natasha Castellano	Accountant
Address	2 Stanley Street Collingwood Melbourne VIC 3066
Phone	(03) 8415 6200
Fax	(03) 9419 7445
E-mail	parity@chp.org.au
Website	www.chp.org.au

Promotion of Conferences, Events and Publications

Organisations are invited to have their promotional fliers included in the monthly mailout of *Parity*. Rates: \$90 National distribution, \$70 Statewide distribution only.

Write for Parity!

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 who are homeless. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor.

CHP Website, eNews and Social Media

www.chp.org.au/services/parity-magazine/
Contributions can be sent by email to parity@chp.org.au in a Microsoft Word or rtf format. If this option is not possible. Contributions can be faxed on (03) 9419 7445 or mailed to CHP.

Subscribe to our **free eNews** to be kept up to date on all the latest news and information from the housing and homelessness sector. Subscribe at: chp.org.au/news-and-events/enewsletters/

Follow us on Twitter: @CHPvic

Follow us on Facebook: [facebook.com/counciltohomeless/](https://www.facebook.com/counciltohomeless/)

2018 Parity Publications Schedule

NB: Please note that this may be subject to change. Please check out the CHP website: www.chp.org.au for updates.

February:	Responding to Homelessness in Queensland
March:	The Future of Women's Refuges
April:	Young People, Trauma and Homelessness
May:	Revisiting Rough Sleeping
June:	Older People Experiencing Homelessness: What Models of Housing and Support Work Best?
July:	At the Coalface: Issues in Homelessness Sector Workforce Development
August:	Issues of Substance: Substance Abuse and Homelessness
September:	"Marginal Housing: Where to From Here?" joint edition with the AHI
October:	Mental Health, Housing and Homelessness
November:	Responding to Homelessness in the ACT
December:	Housing First

Cover artwork

Carrying A Queenslander through the snow in a shirt and shorts by Fintan Magee

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

Foreword | 4

The Honourable Mick de Brenni MP,
Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Sport and Digital Technology

Editorial | 5

Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons

Introduction

Seven Years On: Continuity and Change in How We Approach | 7

Homelessness and Housing in Queensland

Phil Crane, Guest Editor and Associate Professor of Social Work, School of Social Sciences, University of the Sunshine Coast

Chapter 1: The Current Approach to Homelessness in Queensland

The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027 | 10

Department of Housing and Public Works

Assessing Queensland's Housing Strategy | 14

Jon Eastgate, 99 Consulting

Understanding and Meeting the Contemporary Needs of People | 16

Impacted by Domestic and Family Violence

Department of Housing and Public Works

Clean Clothes and Fresh Food Restore Dignity | 18

Department of Housing and Public Works

Chapter 2: Program, Service and Practice Responses to Homelessness in Queensland

The Benefits of Good Governance | 19

Helen Wood, Chair, Brisbane Youth Service Board

U1R Brisbane: A Synthesis of Collaboration and Imagination | 21

Dominic Hale, Jenny Schulz, Travis Radunz and Fiona Caniglia, Under 1 Roof

Responding to Stigma | 24

Chris Deighton, Operations Manager Queensland, Accommodation and Housing Services, The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory

Including All, Working Together: Partnerships in 2017 | 26

Hazel Bassett, Team Leader, Gold Coast Homeless Health Outreach Team, Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service and Liz Fritz, Patron, Gold Coast Homeless Network Inc.

YFS Logan: Embedding Housing Responses | 28

Throughout a Multi-disciplinary Organisation

Judith Hunter and Christine Grose, YFS Logan

IT Solutions in Homelessness: Partnering with Business | 30

Elizabeth (Liz) Fritz AM, Patron, Gold Coast Homelessness Network Inc and 7CareConnect Project Manager for GCHN

SPER Work and Development Orders: | 32

New SPER Laws to Provide Fair and Flexible Fine Options

Paula Hughes, Policy and Casework Lawyer and Belinda Tang, Seconded Lawyer, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, LawRight

Homelessness with HART: Our Story So Far | 34

Jodie Cowie, Coordinator of HART 4000

The Art of Community Work: | 35

An Alternative Approach to Reducing Inter-generational Homelessness

Luan Murat, Programs Officer, Mareeba Community Housing Company Ltd

Chapter 3: Responding to Homelessness in Regional and Remote Queensland

Delivering Remote Housing that Meets the Needs | 36

of Individual Households and Communities

Department of Housing and Public Works

Cairns Street to Home, | 38

Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation

Dr Phil Flint, Regional Leader North Queensland, Natalie Musumeci, Program Manager Douglas House and Woree Facility and Mark Jentz, Program Manager Going Places, Mission Australia

Homelessness in Rural and Regional Queensland Mining Communities | 41

Shane Warren, PhD Student, School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith Health, Griffith University, Dr Donna McDonald, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Griffith University and Professor Donna McAuliffe, School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith

Keeping Homelessness on the Agenda | 43

Jessica Vidafar, Operations Manager, The Cairns Housing and Homelessness Network

How to Keep Your Place: | 44

Vulnerability of Older Indigenous Women to Homelessness in Far North Queensland

Frances Every, Homelessness Support Service Worker

My Money Program: | 47

Supporting Pathways to Financial and Housing Stability

Sharon Edwards, Financial Inclusion Program Manager, Shelter Housing Action Cairns

Dignity First | 50

Jessica Vidafar, Operations Manager, Access Community Housing

Chapter 4: Key Issues and Themes in the Response to Homelessness in Queensland

A: Housing and Housing Issues in Queensland

The Brisbane Housing Story | 51

Jon Eastgate, 99 Consulting

Just Cause: | 55

A Just Outcome for Queensland Private Renters

Penny Carr, Chief Executive Officer, Tenants Queensland

Supplying Affordable Housing: | 58

Challenges and Solutions

Jamie Muchall, Chief Operations Officer, Horizon Housing

Australian's First Rental Vulnerability Index | 60

Penny Carr, Chief Executive Officer, Tenants Queensland

The Ache for Home: Rental Affordability in Brisbane | 61

Leanne Wood, Research, Social Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Anglicare Southern Queensland

More Than Housing: More Than a Home: | 63

Once I Was Homeless...

Kaitlyn Crothers, Tenant Engagement Coordinator, Brisbane Housing Company

Housing is a Human Right, Not Simply a Human Service | 65

Ross Westoby, Project Worker, Innovation, Performance and Evaluation and Karyn Walsh, Chief Executive Officer, Micah Projects

Housing and Homelessness in Rural Communities | 67

Cheryl Prosser, Business Development Coordinator, Horizon Housing Company Ltd

The Role of Neighbourhood Centres in Housing | 69

Siobhan Delgado, Sector Development Officer, Queensland Families and Communities Association

B: Responding to Indigenous Homelessness

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Pathways | 71

Department of Housing and Public Works

Systematic Improvement of Housing | 73

in the Aboriginal Community of Cherbourg

Phil Crane and Sean Nicholson

Aboriginal Sociality and Kinship in West End Street Life | 76

Paul Memmott and Alex Bond, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, University of Queensland

C: Responding to Youth Homelessness

Creating Brighter Futures: | 79

The Role of Youth Foyers in Providing Pathways to Independence for Young Vulnerable Queenslanders

Department of Housing and Public Works

Youth to Work: Opportunities to Break the Cycle | 81

of Intergenerational Dependency

The Department of Housing and Public Works

Social Bonds for Youth Homelessness | 82

The Queensland Treasury

Youth Homelessness in Queensland | 85

Darren Young, Queensland and Northern Territory State Director, Mission Australia

Youth CONNECT: | 88

Building Resilience to Homelessness in Young People

Leanne Rutherford, General Manager, Children, Youth and Families, Churches of Christ in Queensland

Sustaining Young Tenancies: | 90

An Innovative Program to Prevent Homelessness

Dr Nicola Brackertz, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) and Adam Barnes, Brisbane Youth Service

We are not all the same: | 93

Exploring Difference in Young People's Experiences of Couch Surfing Versus Sleeping Rough

Rhianon Vichta and Katie Hail-Jares, Brisbane Youth Service

The Recovery Orientation Model in Action: | 96

How Meaningful Change Can, and Does, Happen for Homeless Young People

Jacqui de la Rue, Brisbane Youth Service

On the Road to Independence | 99

Kylie Dodds, Children, Youth and Families, Churches of Christ Care

Creating Digital Pathways Out of Homelessness: | 101

Digital Technology Design for Young People, Wellbeing and Engagement with Support

Rhianon Vichta, Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) and Dr Karleen Gwinner, Adjunct Research Fellow, Latrobe University, Health Sciences

The Ethical Dimension of Fundraising | 104

in the Homelessness Sector

Laura Watson, Brisbane Youth Service

Creating Community: | 105

Developing a Group Work Model for Young Women with an Experience of Homelessness

Laura Christie, Brisbane Youth Service Centre for Young Women

Using Art Therapy as a Tool for | 107

Relationship Management in Supported Residential Settings for Homeless Young People

Kristin Penhaligon and Tara Harriden, Brisbane Youth Service

Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness in Northgate | 109

Laura Holdstock, Service Coordinator, The Lodge Youth Support Service Inc.

D: Domestic and Family Violence

'Now it's my time' of Being an Expert | 111

in One's Own Life

Leanne Wood, Research, Social Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Anglicare Southern Queensland with Carol Birrell, Service Manager, Homelessness Services Women and Families, Anglicare Southern Queensland

Intimate Partner Violence and Homelessness: | 113

Young Women Lost in the Intersectionality

Rhianon Vichta and Ashleigh Husband, Brisbane Youth Service

'Homelessness is not who I am, | 116

it doesn't define me as a person or a mother, it is not my identity'

Deb Blakeney, In-Place (Nambour, Queensland)

E: Consumer Perspectives

Digital Story Project, | 119

Council to Homeless Persons Queensland

Deborah Blakeney, President Council to Homeless Persons Queensland

F: Health and Homelessness

Supporting Homeless and Vulnerably Housed Patients: | 122

Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital Service Model

Christen Reid, Emergency Department Homeless Liaison Social Worker, Department of Social Work and Psychology, Metro North Hospital and Health Service

Integrated Mental Health Approach Sustains Tenancies | 124

Department of Housing and Public Works

Working Outside of the Box: | 126

Community Clozapine Commencement for the Homeless Using Assertive Outreach

Barbara Baumgartner, Deanna Erskine and Briony, Homeless Health Outreach Team, Metro North Mental Health — RBWH, Metro North Hospital and Health Service (HHS)

Opinion

Leone Crayden | 129

Chief Executive Officer, QShelter

Foreword

The Honourable Mick de Brenni MP,
Minister for Housing and Public Works, Minister for Digital Technology and Minister for Sport



Welcome to the Queensland edition of *Parity*.

Like other states and territories of Australia, Queensland is no stranger to homelessness. In parts of our state homelessness is experienced at rates well above the national average, and our decentralised state presents its own challenges when it comes to responding to the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

In many ways though, homelessness is the same in Queensland as anywhere. It's a social condition as much as a physical condition and it affects people from every walk of life.

I have always thought that our greatest opportunities as a society lie with our youngest citizens, the next generation. What sticks out with me about the young homeless friends who I've met, is their paths in and out of homelessness are all so different. So breaking down approaches to homelessness as some sort of binary choice inevitably misses the mark.

Homelessness isn't a discrete thing that everyone experiences in a similar way. People find themselves without a

home for a range of reasons, and they have countless different experiences. For that reason, our focus should be less on the question of 'what pathway should we take as policy makers and providers', and concentrate more on the pathways that we can provide for people who are doing it tough.

We all wish there was a silver bullet — a simple solution that could end homelessness overnight. However, our decisions must be guided by the reality that if we could click our fingers and build a house for everyone who is homeless today, we would still have people on the streets tomorrow.

There will still be the 14-year-old who has been beaten up and kicked out by his dad, because his sexuality doesn't sit well with him.

There will still be the teenage mum who takes the opportunity to flee with her kids and drive as far as she can while her abusive partner is out.

There will still be the divorced or widowed middle-aged man, who can't afford the mortgage, and is struggling to re-enter the workforce after an extended period out of work.

These aren't hypotheticals. They are stories that happen every day, in cities and towns right across the country.

And in a way that seems to rub salt into a wound, homelessness isn't houselessness; it's something much deeper.

It's about a lack of connection.

And because there is such an array of causes, and individual experiences and responses are so varied, we ought to look at more than a bricks and mortar only approach.

In early 2017, I visited areas that had been impacted by Cyclone Debbie, where a number of people were displaced.

Most of those people weren't sleeping on the streets. They stayed with friends and family, in sleeping bags, on couches, in spare rooms and on living room floors.

This experience is the everyday reality for so many young people and older women. There is no distinction. We call it hidden homelessness, and it isn't necessarily well recognised. The lack of safe secure accommodation has an impact on every facet of a person's life, and limits their ability to access education and jobs.

In 2017 the Palaszczuk Government launched its \$1.8 billion Queensland Housing Strategy, which will see more than 5,500 new social and affordable homes built in Queensland. I'm pleased to be a Housing Minister that builds hundreds of millions of dollars of new housing — but I know for sure that's not enough.

We need to keep building houses, but we also need to couple a bricks and mortar approach to homelessness with an approach that is centred on dignity, and is based in love.

All of us are a twist of fate away from being homeless. I try never to forget that. If we continue to move in the right direction, to use every tool at our disposal and use empathy as our guide, we can help more of our homeless friends and have a more just and fair society.

Because this journey of ours is a journey that will never be complete, it makes it even more important that we walk together.

Editorial

Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons



Welcome to the 'Responding to Homelessness in Queensland', a truly bumper edition of *Parity*! As many of you will be aware, finalising this edition was delayed by the November 2017 Queensland State Election. In the Westminster system, government business goes into 'caretaker mode' when an election is called. Consistent with that tradition and with a new government now in place, the Queensland edition of *Parity* can now be published!

In August 2010 the original 'Responding to Homelessness in Queensland' edition of *Parity* was published. Seven years on, Queenslanders committed to ending homelessness have again come together to take stock. Government, the specialist homelessness and social housing sectors have taken the opportunity to work together to both consider and document what remains, what has been strengthened and what has changed.

This edition reflects the changes in government policy we have seen and the developments in service

provision that have followed, as well as the innovations undertaken by the sector. It also reflects the changes we have seen in the way homelessness manifests in our community and in the way it is characterised.

The edition reflects our deeper understanding of the nature of rough sleeping, the prevalence of family violence, the extent of youth homelessness, the particular needs of children, the growth of the homelessness experienced by older women and men and the unique challenges for Aboriginal Australians. There are detailed accounts of the high quality practice ending homelessness across these groups in urban, metropolitan, regional and remote communities.

This edition also includes wide ranging reflections including on the roles of governance, community development, partnerships, housing first and crisis responses. It is informed by the perspective of those with the lived experience of homelessness. The edition celebrates the changes and developments in the service response to homelessness that we have put in place, as well as identifying those that are still required.

This edition of *Parity* was made possible by the wholehearted support of the Queensland Government. The project also relied on very strong support from the Queensland specialist homelessness and social housing sectors.



On the streets of Brisbane during 500 Lives 500 Homes Campaign Registry Fortnight. Photo: Patrick Hamilton

This willing support and involvement is emblematic of the response to homelessness in Queensland.

This edition showcases the Queensland Housing Strategy; a strategy built on extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders across the state. These consultations were consistently reported as paying attention to the voices of those living the experience of homelessness, hearing the need for access to affordable housing, as well as listening to those who actually deliver services to those most in need.

As a country, for decades now, we have failed to systematically invest in social housing. The Federal Government's stimulus investment in the immediate wake of the 2008 global financial crisis was the last sizeable effort. At a time when many governments continue to avoid the issue altogether, the Queensland Government is to be commended for its commitment to creating and increasing the supply of social and affordable housing. While we are a long way from having enough, it is refreshing to see that the provision of increased social housing is seen as part of the 'solution' rather than as part of the 'problem'.

Far too often homelessness and the need for affordable housing are diminished by being categorised as 'wicked problems' that defy solution. The Queensland Housing Strategy does not however vacate the policy field as 'too hard' or hand over responsibility to the private sector and the market. The Strategy demonstrates that government can make a positive and very real difference, working in partnership with the sector and the community to develop policies that work.

This is perhaps best exemplified by the ambition set out for Strategy by the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works.

'Our vision is to prevent people from becoming homeless by ensuring they get the right support to either remain housed or access suitable housing. This will require a service system that is easy for people to navigate

and integrates seamlessly with other homelessness, housing and human services.'

The Council to Homeless Persons congratulates the Queenslanders committed to ending homelessness in supporting this stocktake, and thanks you for working with our *Parity* Editor Noel Murray to develop and produce this outstanding edition of *Parity*.

Acknowledgements

The Council to Homeless Persons would like to acknowledge and thank the Queensland Government through the Department of Housing and Public Works for their sponsorship of this edition of *Parity*. This sponsorship provided the basis for the further sponsorship support that was provided

by Queensland Shelter, Micah Projects, QCOSS, Mission Australia, In Place, The Salvation Army, Tenants Queensland, Brisbane Youth Services, Churches for Christ in Queensland, Brisbane Housing Company, Horizon Housing Company, Community and Anglicare Southern Queensland. Many thanks to all those homelessness and social housing organisations that supported this edition of *Parity*.

The Council to Homeless Persons would also like to thank Lisa Giles and Belinda Lewis from the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works for all their work on the development and preparation of this edition.

Finally, many thanks to Guest Editors Phil Crane and Cameron Parsell.



Mum and daughter outside their remote housing property
Photo provided by the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works

Introduction

Seven Years On: Continuity and Change in How We Approach Homelessness and Housing in Queensland

Phil Crane, Guest Editor and Associate Professor of Social Work, School of Social Sciences, University of the Sunshine Coast



It has been seven years since the previous and first Queensland edition of *Parity* 'hit the newsstands' in 2010. What has changed and not changed in the Queensland homelessness and housing landscape during this time?

In 2010 the Rudd and then Gillard Labor Australian Government was in the process of implementing the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) and Queensland was largely focused on developing its response to homelessness in the context of the 2008 *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* White Paper recommendations.

The Labor Government of Anna Bligh was in power but would lose office to the Campbell Newman led Liberal National Party (LNP) in 2012.

The Queensland policy context in which this edition is located is headlined by the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* released in June 2017. In late 2017 Queensland had a state election which necessitated a delay in the

finalisation and release of this edition. In the foreword to this edition the Queensland Government Minister for Housing and Public Works indicates the *Queensland Housing Strategy* is broad rather than narrow in its scope and includes homelessness, social and affordable housing, private rental, home ownership and retirement living.

The analysis of the Housing Strategy by Jon Eastgate highlights a number of features of the Queensland context, including the relative absence of the Commonwealth in the current policy landscape, and the generally welcomed positive direction of the Strategy. In particular, Eastgate highlights the commitment to enhanced levels of social housing and the proposed assistance to those renting privately. As flagged in the 2010 edition, the core difficulty confronting governments and the service sector is that despite a range of positive developments in policy and practice, the growth in the need for affordable housing continues to exceed growth in its availability, and rental affordability, vital to those who experience homelessness or are on low incomes, has been declining.

Overall, the consensus seems to be: *'Acknowledge a clear and persistent positive effort over time. But more needs to be done'* — not only in terms of quantum of dedicated resources, but also in terms of the synergy between how we conceptualise the issues, enhance the legitimacy of housing and homelessness policy in the broader political arena (particularly at the national level), and provide support which is connected, responsive to people's often complex needs and rights, and that is sustained over time.

So how do the foci and themes in this Queensland edition of *Parity* resonate and differ to those raised in the 2010 edition?

As expected there are numerous continuities. It is apparent that the drivers of homelessness and inadequate housing which were spoken about in 2010 persist, with 'affordability' the key current vehicle for attending to the structural level. While very complimentary about the policy and service developments both nationally and within Queensland at the time (Queensland was cited as a leading state) Adrian Pisarski warned in 2010 that while new services were a necessary and welcome addition to the homelessness service system, the level of demand for services was growing faster than supply, as was the demand for the support provided by a range of services to assist those experiencing homelessness with higher needs (2010). The 2017 edition affirms these sentiments.

A number of articles in this edition talk to importance and character of affordable and accessible social housing. Unpacking the concept of 'homelessness' itself also continues, whether this is in terms how to define in respect of Indigenous people (Paul Memmott and Alex Bond) or by making more complex the assumed distinctions between sleeping rough and couch surfing by young people, or by challenging the labelling impact of the use of the term itself (highlighted by both consumers and service providers).

A range of other foci articulated in 2010 continue to be front and centre in 2017 edition, including the need for the most vulnerable to have for ongoing support post-crisis and post-tenancy, the importance of services and practice frameworks which bridge

across the complex intersection of human need and service systems, how we meet the housing and support needs of particular groups through a combination of policy and service support, to mention just a few. The diverse and regional character of Queensland is evident with articles from across the state, including ones focusing on Indigenous communities, mining towns, as well as urban, regional and remote areas.

There is continuing advocacy on legal rights issues associated with renting, including the need for 'just cause' evictions (or terminations). The article by Penny Carr details the high relative proportion of people renting in Queensland and the long argued case for further protection of their access to sustained affordable accommodation. Rental issues for those on low incomes should be seen in the context of housing and taxation policies:

Property investors received generous taxation benefits through negative gearing and reduced capital gains liability. We need to be asking residential property investors for a social-good contribution in exchange.
(Penny Carr, 2017)

This latest edition also reports on the development of the Work and Development Order Scheme to assist people experiencing financial hardship deal with debts to Government agencies.

The digital world and how to more effectively utilise the new and developing technologies, is fast gaining the attention of human services agencies. One article refers to the development of a specific web based app providing service locations and information to consumers, service providers and the general community, accessible through a Smart Phone, or any device that has access to the internet, making the provision of support 'real time' (Liz Fritz et al). Technology related strategies are also being utilised to provide support to rural workers and offices, facilitate telling the stories of people who have experienced homelessness and service support (Deb Blakeney), and for e-learning by practitioners. But in the context of specialist homelessness support the character

of such digitech is suggested as needing to be built on '*trusted personal interactions*' (Rhianon Vichta and Karleen Gwinner).

A broadening suite of funding approaches and sources have been or are being developed, trialled and reported. Articles refer to various non-traditional approaches to funding responses to homelessness and housing need, including the Queensland Government's Dignity First Fund, that commenced in 2016, and the Social Benefit Bond investment approach (Queensland Treasury Corporation and Leanne Rutherford). Also outlined is a cross subsidised public-private sector partnership model, the 'Reserve and Hundred Hills' housing development, where a housing development cross-subsidises rent for affordable housing (Jamie Muchall). In a cautionary note the ethics of fund raising for homelessness services is also raised.

In the current edition there is also an emerging attention to 'outcomes' as a measure of effectiveness, though this is more emerging and implied by increased attention to evaluation and service user data, along with outcomes measures being used in pilot approaches to funding such as Social Benefit Bonds. Watch this space!

An increased interest in governance is evident in this current Queensland edition of *Parity*, not only as an interest from government but as a self-recognised interest of non-government organisations. The relationship between good agency governance processes and sustainable service delivery benefits for vulnerable clients is explored in the contribution from Brisbane Youth Services Board Chair Helen Woods who argues for *embracing governance and service delivery as symbiotic forces*.

There is continuing interest in, and emerging evaluative insight, regarding system and service integration and collaboration, including the use of enhanced communication, coordination, and collaboration/partnerships within and between services and systems. Some of these were also outlined in the 2010 edition (such as U1R, and Brisbane Common Ground),

providing an opportunity to consider how particular innovations have developed over time and what collaboration challenges they now experience some years down the track. The value of multi-disciplinary and 'flexible' approaches to partnership are the focus of particular service contributions (Hazel Bassett et al and Judith Hunter and Christine Grose).

Likewise, there is a continuing interest in the needs and responses to particular groups within the community. In 2017 we see a continued concern with service models for young people experiencing homelessness, and a much more substantial focus on women's homelessness (particularly older women), family and Indigenous homelessness and housing. Domestic and family violence is now more prominent with explicit attention being given by both government and non-government services.

We also see the continued development of tools to assist identify and categorise levels of need and vulnerability. The *Rental Vulnerability Index (RVI)* (Penny Carr) and the *Vulnerability Index Service Prioritisation Decision Assistant Tool (VI-SPDAT)* (Ross Westoby and Karyn Walsh) reflect efforts to differentiate and prioritise need.

There has also been significant attention to housing in Indigenous communities where overcrowding has and continues to be a significant issue. Articles examining this issue across Queensland (Department of Housing and Public Works) and in respect of Cherbourg (Phil Crane and Sean Nicolson) provide support for sustained enhancements to the housing available in Indigenous communities. The reality is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are four times more likely to be homeless compared with non-Indigenous people, and this is increasing (Department of Housing and Public Works citing the Australian Bureau of Statistics). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan and plans to establish a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Body (Department of Housing and Public



Brisbane street art

Works) are welcome responses to this reality. The importance of appreciating the lived experience and attachments to place of Aboriginal people over time and the implications this has for how their homelessness is understood is also examined (Paul Memmott and Alex Bond).

The specific nature and character of homelessness support is the subject of a number of contributions from a number of service providers and is discussed in terms of necessarily involving a combination of assertive outreach, housing first informed attention to accessing accommodation, direct support and the coordination of wrap around services. Various approaches to the articulation of housing, accommodation and support are reported, including Brisbane Common Ground, youth foyers (Department of Housing and Public Works), and sustaining tenancies exemplars (Nicola Brakertz and Adam Barnes). Also evident is the development of a range of health oriented services directed to those who are homeless and seen as having complex needs, examples being the Recovery Orientation Model (Jacqui de la Rue), the Hospital Emergency

Department Homeless Liaison Officer (HEDLO) (Christen Reid et al.), and the Mental Health Demonstration Project (Department of Housing and Public Works).

Some Reflections

There are a number of areas where there is less presence or attention in this 2017–18 edition. Unlike in 2010 there is little voice or role proposed from Queensland local government. In 2010 Brisbane City Council was cited in several articles as a key supporter and funder of initiatives, and this shift reflects a diminished role in social initiatives around homelessness and social housing by Brisbane City Council after Campbell Newman became Mayor in April 2011.

In terms of support services, the principles underpinning policy and practice directions in 2010 emphasised the importance of being client-centred, a 'no wrong door' approach and a correlative emphasis on collaboration. The logic for this emanates from what is understood as a complex interplay of the needs of people, the complexity of the phenomena of homelessness itself, and the difficulty society, systems and services often have in responding with empathy, coherence, and timeliness.

In this current edition of *Parity* the frame of complexity can be found in many of the contributions. Complexity is often used to typify complexity at the individual level, that is, to indicate multiple intersecting needs or problems as defined by systems and services. Both a growing body of research and the accounts of people who have been homeless (a number of which are in this edition) warn us against seeing complexity as essentially located in the people who have presenting needs, or as simply the intersection of different categories of problem. Rather it is the intersection and interaction between people and economic, social, housing and service systems which manifests in what we see as complexity. The article on young women and inter-partner violence argues that a frame of complexity is essential if we are to adequately respond.

Along with policy that facilitates access to affordable rental and housing options and policy that is explicitly person-centred and inter-disciplinary, community development strategies also have an important role to play in adequately appreciating and responding effectively to that suite of complexities that are understood and articulated as homelessness.

Chapter 1: The Current Approach to Homelessness in Queensland

The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027

Department of Housing and Public Works

The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027 (the strategy) was released by the Queensland Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk on 12 June 2017. It is a ten-year framework that guides targeted investment and service delivery reforms that are collectively aimed at delivering improved housing outcomes for all Queenslanders.

Delivering an effective response to emerging housing challenges will require new partnerships between national, state and local stakeholders and a coordinated approach to identifying and implementing innovative solutions. The strategy outlines Queensland's

commitment to working collectively across the housing and human service systems to make a real difference in people's lives.

The strategy will position the state to respond effectively and comprehensively to the range of challenges we face, including population growth, an ageing population, homelessness, housing affordability and supply and people's changing needs. It will also ensure that those most in need are supported by an effective safety net which includes delivering stable housing options linked to human services and support.

A substantial proportion of people requiring housing assistance face multiple disadvantages and have complex needs. These are often people who need support from multiple human service agencies such as aged care, mental health and disability services or through community facilities like neighbourhood centres.

The strategy is supported by an additional \$1.8 billion investment, over ten years, to deliver more social and affordable housing, relieve housing affordability pressures, drive service delivery reform and respond to the needs of Queensland's most vulnerable people.



The Honourable Mick de Brenni MP speaking at the AHURI Homelessness and Housing Solutions conference, in 2017

Photo provided by the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works



Image from the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*

Photo provided by the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works

The strategy spans the entire housing continuum, including homelessness, social and affordable housing, private rental, home ownership and retirement living. Reflecting this broad scope, the strategy focuses on four key areas: Growth, Prosperity, Connections and Confidence.

Consultation

The strategy was developed after undertaking extensive community consultation in 2016. The consultation process included community, sector and industry feedback and focussed on identifying people's experiences, expectations and aspirations for Queensland's housing future.

Nearly 1,900 people attended 76 engagement events across the state and we received 869 online survey responses and 188 written submissions.

Key priorities identified during consultation

Participants identified a range of key priorities including to:

- develop more person-centred support to help people secure and sustain a tenancy
- improve service delivery to support vulnerable people
- better integrate services to address issues that may impact tenancies
- improve cultural awareness for the design and delivery of housing and homelessness services
- better understand the needs of client groups struggling to access/sustain secure housing

- better connect housing and education and training services
- overcome barriers to housing access (affordability, discrimination, rental history)
- provide greater choice of housing options
- increase social housing availability
- ensure fairer rent arrangements.

Growth: Boosting Social and Affordable Housing Supply and Economic Growth

Queensland's population is expected to increase by 18 per cent over the next decade (877,000 people) which will require an additional 371,000 dwellings to be added to the current housing supply. While an increase in the overall housing supply is necessary to address population growth, it needs to be supplemented by a range of other actions to ensure available housing is affordable.

The strategy will contribute to improved housing outcomes for vulnerable households by increasing the supply of social and affordable housing and ensuring this investment acts as a catalyst for precinct development, strengthening local communities and boosting local economic activity.

This includes increasing the provision of affordable housing options, while ensuring it is delivered as part of a broader program to help households find and remain in stable housing.

The new Housing Construction Jobs Program (the program) will align the

growth of housing supply with the development and planning of priority precincts to support population growth and economic development, rather than a piecemeal 'lot by lot' approach. The program takes a whole-of-government approach through partnership between the Department of Housing and Public Works (the department), Economic Development Queensland and key agencies, which will underpin and support increased economic and social participation for vulnerable Queenslanders.

Building new social and affordable housing

The Housing Construction Jobs Program is a core initiative of the strategy and will make a substantial contribution to growing social and affordable housing supply.

The program redefines how the Queensland Government will deliver housing to support urban renewal and precinct development, increase private market and affordable housing supply, generate new jobs and drive innovative housing design that responds to contemporary needs.

More than 5,000 new social and affordable housing dwellings will be delivered over the ten-year strategy (including more than 1,700 new dwellings in the first three years).

In addition, we will leverage underutilised government land, and partner with private industry and

community housing providers, to improve the supply of affordable housing, which will address the current gap between social housing and private housing.

Prosperity: Fostering Housing Pathways and Brighter Futures

The strategy is underpinned by a shift from a program-centred approach, to a person-centred approach, that will provide Queenslanders in need with pathways to economic independence through a range of housing options.

This will include developing a suite of flexible products and services (including loans, subsidies, head-leases and supports) that will help to reduce the barriers to securing private rental tenancies and help people sustain their tenancies. Some of the products will be tailored to assist women escaping domestic and family violence to re-establish a home.

The aim is to deliver positive support to people to help them progress through the housing continuum, so allocation to social housing is no longer the end-point of assistance.

This will include more active engagement and collaboration with people to develop Home Pathway Plans. These plans will be jointly developed by the Department's housing officers and public housing tenants, to identify tenants' needs and goals, resources and skills, and the services that will help them achieve their housing aspirations.

Home Pathway Plans

Home Pathway Plans (plans) will be developed with people seeking housing assistance.

The plans will be person-centred and recognise the unique mix of circumstances, needs, strengths and vulnerabilities of the individual. They will identify strengths that can be built on, achievable actions, necessary supports and practical steps for people to reach their housing goals and aspirations. The plans will also help support people's capability to manage their finances and therefore create greater independence and broader housing options.

Support may include flexible housing assistance products that are designed to enable people to better access and sustain private housing opportunities.

The Home Pathways approach will actively assist people to find a suitable home appropriate to their needs and to create genuine opportunities to progress through the housing continuum.

Other strategy actions will complement this approach by working with the private market and community housing providers to deliver new affordable housing options and introducing changes that ensure housing markets operate in a fair and supportive way for vulnerable households.

Working in partnership to Close the Gap

The Queensland Government recognises the complex housing challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is committed to developing solutions in partnership with communities and stakeholders to improve housing outcomes.

We will investigate and establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing body to work with Indigenous Community Housing Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils to improve housing outcomes in urban and regional areas and remote and discrete communities. The role and scope of the housing body will be developed with input from key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

We will also develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan, with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

Other Housing Strategy commitments include providing support for Indigenous Queenslanders to own their own home and developing a new accommodation facility for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls, from remote communities, to access education and employment opportunities.

Connections: Helping People to Sustain Their Tenancies Through a Seamless Service System

Under the strategy, we will create a housing support system that is well integrated and tailored to individuals' needs and provides flexible products and genuine wraparound services to improve housing choices and stability.

Our vision is to prevent people from becoming homeless by ensuring they get the right support to either remain housed or access suitable housing. This will require a service system that is easy for people to navigate and integrates seamlessly with other homelessness, housing and human services.

Housing and Homelessness Hubs

People who are experiencing homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness, will find it easier to access the housing and support services they need through five new housing and homelessness service hubs (hubs) that will be established over three years in Toowoomba, Logan, Cairns, Moreton Bay region and Townsville. The hubs will supplement existing services by improving coordination and delivery.

Each hub will be designed collaboratively with local communities to ensure it responds to the local environment and the unique characteristics and needs of each location. Such factors include community demographics, demand for housing assistance, available services, existing networks (including hub-like services) and the nature of the private housing market and available social housing.

These hubs will bring together government and non-government housing, homelessness and other local support services, to integrate service delivery and enable people to access the services they need in one place.

As part of the Housing and Homelessness Hub model, we will improve our intake and assessment process to make it easier for people to access our services. By integrating support services that can share information, we can reduce the need for people to have to retell their story several times, which can be traumatic.

We will also create a more holistic needs assessment process to better understand and identify an individual's personal challenges and required supports. This will be part of a suite of reforms to create a more connected housing service system that provides seamless pathways from crisis and transitional housing to safe, secure and stable housing.

The Dignity First Fund

Homelessness is a complex issue and people can experience it for a myriad of different reasons. While the Queensland Government funds specialist homelessness services and complementary housing programs aimed at assisting people experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, there is an array of services and activities funded externally that deliver immense value to the community.

In July 2016, the Queensland Government established the inaugural \$2.5 million Dignity First Fund to provide innovative, non-traditional responses delivered by community-based organisations, to help Queenslanders experiencing homelessness live with dignity and to improve their quality of life.

A second \$2.5 million funding round was undertaken in mid-2017. The funding program seeks grounded, practical ideas that make a difference to the lives of people experiencing homelessness, and prevent or reduce homelessness through early intervention strategies.

Preference was given to proposals that respond to homelessness in regional or remote parts of Queensland and/or deliver services that address the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people, women and children escaping domestic and family violence and older people.

There has been strong interest in the fund with almost 190 proposals, from 163 organisations submitted over the two funding rounds. Of these, 54 projects were approved and are now delivering a wide range of innovative and essential services that are making a real difference to the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

The Dignity First Fund builds on the investment that the Queensland Government has committed to delivering through the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* to address homelessness.

Housing referral teams

Housing referral teams (teams) will be established in Housing Service Centres to help people access safe and secure housing and link them to supports to improve their wellbeing and housing outcomes. The teams will work in partnership with people seeking housing assistance to develop Home Pathway Plans.

The teams will build strong relationships with local specialist homelessness services, community housing providers and other support services and government agencies to enhance service networks that provide referral pathways for clients. They will work collaboratively with other government services, and non-government providers, so tenants and their families have opportunities to achieve greater economic, social and cultural participation.

Confidence: Reforming the Housing System to Ensure it is Fair and Responsive.

The strategy will deliver a range of reforms to ensure the private rental, retirement and residential services markets operate fairly and provide more diversity and choice. A fairer and more diverse housing system will provide better pathways to suitable housing and enable people to access more housing options.

This will include a range of reforms to the legislation that govern how these sectors operate including greater protection and housing security, and access to better information and support to assist people can make more informed decisions about their housing options.

We will review and modernise the Housing Act 2003 and reform legislation for retirement villages, boarding houses and manufactured homes to ensure fairness, clarity and transparency (for example, better disclosure processes prior to signing contracts for retirement villages). We will ensure that people have a voice, and that there are effective and quick

dispute resolution processes to resolve housing issues.

Legislative changes

The *Housing Legislation (Building Better Futures) Amendment Act 2017* makes changes to the Act that regulates the operation of residential services such as boarding houses, including residential services that provide personal care and aged rental accommodation. Amendments aim to improve safety for residents and ensure compliance with accreditation and registration requirements.

The amendments will also look to improve private rental accommodation by providing a framework for minimum private rental standards.

Moving Forward

The release of the strategy is the start of a ten-year journey of reform that will result in better housing outcomes for all Queenslanders, including those who are the most vulnerable. The *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2020 Action Plan* documents the first steps the department will take towards achieving the ten-year vision and sets out clear priorities for implementation.

The strategy will introduce a stronger evidence-based approach to housing policy and programs. As we implement the first actions over the next three years, we will gather evidence of the outcomes and impacts on peoples' lives to better understand the needs of key cohorts, which will guide and inform the development of subsequent action plans.

The strategy presents us with both opportunities and challenges that we will need to work in partnership to deliver on. Our partnerships with government, non-government and private sector stakeholders are integral to achieving a better housing future for all Queenslanders. The release of the strategy is just the beginning of a longer-term program of transformation, and we are partnering with service providers, industry and the community to collectively deliver this important reform agenda across the state.

Visit www.hpw.qld.gov.au/housing for copies of the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* and *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2020 Action Plan*.

Assessing Queensland's Housing Strategy

Jon Eastgate, 99 Consulting

In July 2017 the Queensland Government released its new *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*, a ten-year blueprint for social and affordable housing and homelessness service delivery. This strategy comes after 18 months of work by the Department of Housing and Public Works and Minister Mick De Brenni, including a state-wide consultation process and almost a year of internal work within the government.

For those like me who are passionate about housing our most vulnerable residents, the strategy has been greeted with a kind of measured hopefulness. There are good things in it and nothing to provoke howls of protest. Yet there are also some missed opportunities, and there are still many areas where the way forward is not entirely clear. The following provides a brief appraisal of some of the key elements of the strategy.

Where is the Commonwealth?

My comments on the Queensland strategy should be seen in the context of significant policy failure at Commonwealth level. Since World War Two housing assistance policy in Australia has been largely driven by Commonwealth funding through successive Commonwealth-State Agreements. Base funding under these agreements has eroded in value over time (the Nation Building Social Housing Initiative aside), so that the amount of funding currently entering the system is not enough to meet its basic costs. This leaves the states with an ongoing and intractable problem — increasing need, ageing housing stock and declining funding. In the absence of any national will to solve this problem, the states are doing the best they can but can only patch up a struggling system.

New Social Housing

A highlight of the Queensland strategy is a commitment to build 6,000 new social and affordable housing dwellings across the state in the coming ten years, including 4,000 between 2017 and 2022. Work has already started on delivering this target, with the first round expressions of interest for the government's Housing Construction Jobs Program closing in July 2017 and tenders for construction on State-owned sites being released progressively through 2017–18.

This program represents a significant increase in investment over what has been delivered in recent years, almost doubling output. A ten-year program also provides some forward planning capability for government, community and private sector partners. Low income households will benefit from increased supply.

However, the increase is off a very low construction base and will not meet the backlog of need in Queensland's housing system. As at June 2017 there were approximately 16,000 households on the social housing register, over two thirds of whom were in high or very high need. This in itself is a drastic under-estimate of the real need — Queensland's homelessness services provided assistance to over 50,000 individuals during 2015–16. The difficulty of accessing social housing means many of these were supported to access housing in the private rental market, but this is hardly a lasting solution to the needs of most, with rents unaffordable and tenure insecure.

There is also a pressing renewal task — much of the State's social housing is old, requiring significant upgrade and it does not match the needs of

the current wait list. The previous government's approach to this began in Logan with the proposed transfer of housing to a community provider and use of the increased income from Commonwealth Rent Assistance to leverage redevelopment of ageing properties. The current government has withdrawn from the transfer, but retains the commitment to renew the Logan's social housing. However, it is not clear how this will be done, and there are no indications at this stage of what might happen beyond Logan.

Unmentioned in this strategy is the impact of the discontinuation of the National Rental Affordability Scheme, which funded approximately 10,000 dwellings in Queensland between 2009 and 2015. With housing secured as affordable rental for ten years under this scheme, the first properties will begin to exit the affordable market in 2019 and the scheme will be completely wound down by the end date of this strategy. While some community housing organisations have funded their projects in a way that will enable them to keep at least some of the housing, much will be lost. This means that over this time we will see a net loss of social and affordable housing unless the Commonwealth's proposed National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation can find an effective way of restarting this investment.

Community Housing

Where does all this leave community housing providers? The previous government's housing strategy envisaged large scale transfers of public housing management to the community sector. This strategy reverses that direction — the government abandoned the only transfer that was in progress, in Logan

City, and although the strategy itself is ambiguous on the subject the Minister has made it clear that the new social housing will remain under government management, while community housing organisations will be encouraged to engage in development of affordable housing.

While some organisations will be able to take advantage of this, it presents a dilemma for the sector as a whole. Most of Queensland's community housing organisations are not developers and have few assets, and up to now their largest area of business has been transitional housing, supporting highly disadvantaged households exiting homelessness. Their engagement in this field is highly constrained by government policy, which dictates who they house, what rent they charge, how they spend any surplus funds and keeps control of the assets while delegating responsibility for maintenance. As a result, community housing organisations find themselves in a funding squeeze with an increasingly disadvantaged tenant cohort, increasing costs and limited flexibility to address the issue. Nothing in this strategy clearly addresses this situation.

Private Tenants

With the pathway to social housing increasingly blocked low income households are more reliant than ever on the private rental market. In recent years the Queensland Government has grown its programs to assist people in the private market, and this is an area where the current government is doing quite well. One of its early acts was to restore tenants' advice services, cut by the previous government, and it has also announced some significant improvements to the *Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act*, the *Retirement Villages Act* and the *Manufactured Homes Act*.

The new strategy also flags 'a new suite of flexible assistance packages to enable access to private rental properties'. While it is not clear at this stage what this will entail it is a clear signal that in the absence of significant growth in social housing we will be increasingly housing people for longer periods in the private market.



Brisbane street art

Homelessness Services

Over the past decade, the homelessness sector has made important gains in the way people enter the system and the way services work together to meet the needs of these highly vulnerable people. This period has also seen the emergence of new and effective responses to homelessness based on various versions of the Housing First principle. Over this period the social housing system has increasingly become a response to homelessness rather than a wider response to housing stress, and households have entered this system via its own single entry point, the Social Housing Register. The weakness of these systems at the moment is that they are not connected, so to get assistance beyond the immediate homelessness response people need to go through a separate application process for the social housing register, repeating information they have already supplied to their homelessness provider and doubling the workload of overloaded staff.

This theme came up repeatedly in the consultations around this strategy, and the government has responded to this by flagging a move towards more seamless service delivery and a more collaborative approach between government and non-government service providers. This change will be welcomed by the sector although we still wait to see what it will involve in practice. We should not

underestimate the difficulty of the task, with the need to address issues around privacy and confidentiality, the need for systems to be simultaneously simple and highly connected, and the need to shift the culture of the Department of Housing and Public Works and of some non-government providers in the direction of more openness and collaboration.

The government has also announced some concrete new services — extra Youth Foyer facilities, extra women's refuges, expansion of the Homestay program, new housing and homelessness service hubs and housing referral teams and increased use of digital technology for access to services. All of this suggests that the government is serious about improving services for people experiencing homelessness.

So What Now?

This is flagged as a ten-year strategy but in practice such strategies are good for about 3 to 5 years. The previous ten-year housing strategy lasted less than two before a change of government consigned it to the archives. At least this time around the government has a full three-year term to implement its agenda. If they can succeed in that, they leave a significantly improved sector, but one with some long-term, difficult challenges still to address. Real game changers are more likely to come from the Commonwealth election which is not due until 2019.

Understanding and Meeting the Contemporary Needs of People Impacted by Domestic and Family Violence

Department of Housing and Public Works

Queensland says Not, Now, Not Ever: Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Strategy

The Queensland Policy Landscape

One of the key features of the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* (the strategy) is the commitment to taking a person-centred approach to delivering high-quality and tailored housing responses to people experiencing homelessness or in housing need. This includes responses for families and women and children impacted by domestic and family violence. The strategy recognises that these clients may need tailored and focused support arrangements, along with access to stable housing.

A main policy driver of the strategy has been the response to the report of the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence in Queensland: *Not Now, Not Ever: Putting an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland*. The response to the report has included improvements to service delivery by the Department of Housing and Public Works (the department), along with the establishment of new services. These services have included new shelters for women and children escaping domestic and family violence, as well as new mobile support services working with women where they live. Government agencies have worked in partnership to ensure that these services have focused on meeting the full range of needs of vulnerable women and children.

Data shows us that too many Queensland families are experiencing homelessness, or are at risk of homelessness, and that women and families are particularly at risk. Sole parent families, predominantly

headed by women, are more likely to rent than families with two parents, in a context where private renters experience higher levels of housing stress than people in other housing tenures. We also know that social housing is critical for women as they represent approximately 60 per cent of government-managed, social housing tenants. These families are often dealing with multiple issues, including contact with child protection systems and domestic and family violence.

The strategy contains specific new initiatives in response to the unique needs of families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. These include trialling the Supportive Housing Initiative for vulnerable children and families and expanding the HomeStay Support early intervention service to support families at risk of homelessness, with a focus on those with children under ten years of age.

It is anticipated that having access to stable housing will provide the foundation vulnerable families need to better address the issues that put them at risk of homelessness and relevant support services to help maintain their tenancies.

Domestic and Family Violence as a Key Cause of Family Homelessness

Evidence demonstrates there is a strong link between the impacts of domestic and family violence and family homelessness. The issues and experiences of individuals and families who become homeless, as a result of domestic and family violence, are sometimes very similar to people experiencing homelessness as a result of family breakdown.¹ According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, one in three

women who seek assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) across Australia are affected by domestic and family violence.

Domestic and family violence is a major cause of homelessness for women and children. In 2014–15, 11,919 clients of Queensland SHS requested/required assistance for domestic and family violence, representing 27.8 per cent of all SHS clients. Of this 27.8 per cent, half (50.8 per cent) were assisted by services funded to provide domestic and family violence assistance, while half (49.2 per cent) were assisted by non-domestic and family violence specific services.

Evidence-based Housing and Support Responses

Evidence shows us that whether women are homeowners or social housing or private rental tenants, domestic and family violence impacts their housing in a variety of ways. Impacts include housing instability, homelessness and long-term economic insecurity. Supporting families to maintain stable housing aligns with an expanding body of research highlighting the value of homelessness prevention and early intervention approaches for women and children affected by domestic and family violence.^{2,3}

Accessing and maintaining safe and appropriate housing are two of the most pressing concerns for women trying to escape domestic and family violence. Effective intervention, such as providing access to appropriate and affordable housing, is essential to preventing women and children experiencing homelessness as a result of domestic and family violence. This housing should be appropriately situated to suit the needs of the individual or family.

The location of accommodation and support services is critical for families affected by domestic and family violence as they need to access employment and maintain school and child care routines.

The department has three key roles to play in addressing this issue:

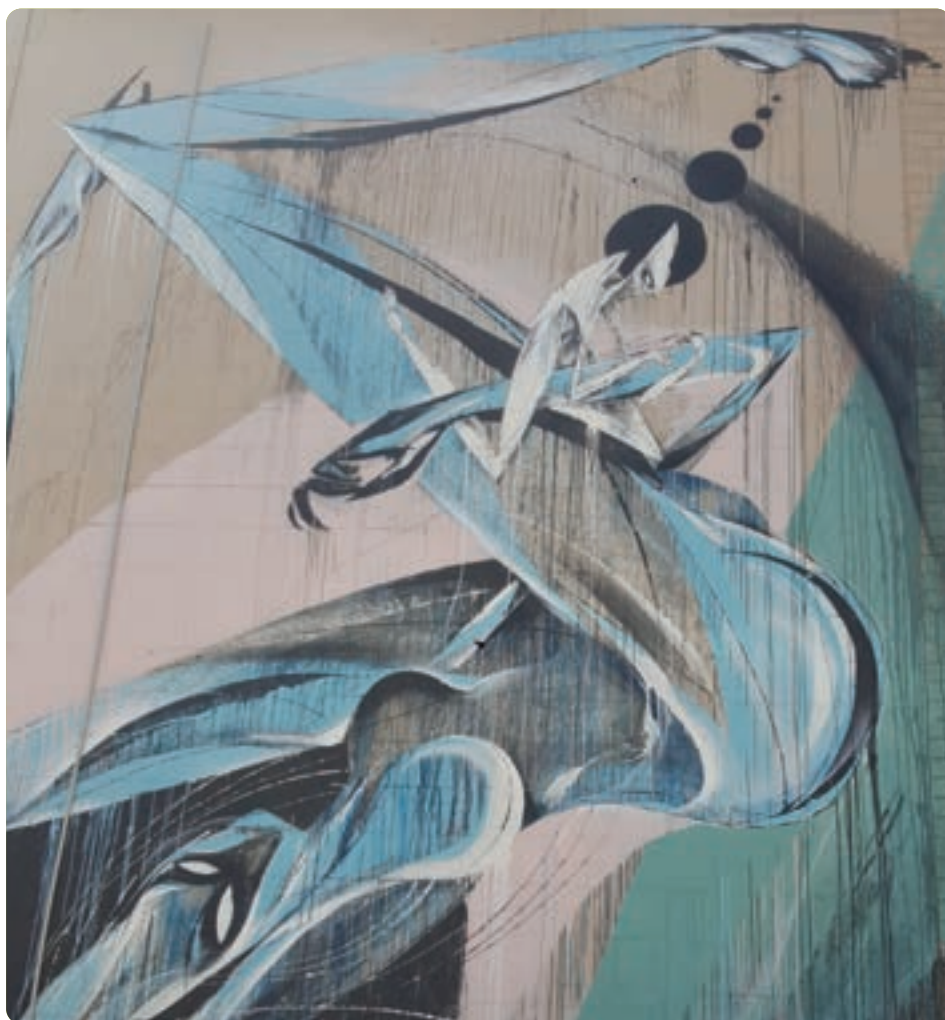
1. providing housing services
2. funding homelessness services for women and children escaping domestic violence
3. enabling and facilitating integrated service responses.

The *Queensland Housing Strategy Action Plan 2017–2020* includes a number of initiatives to address the needs of women and children escaping domestic and family violence.

The Queensland Government has committed \$3.5 million to construct two new crisis shelters in south-east Queensland, for which the department is working in partnership with the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (DCSYW) to deliver. An additional \$6 million has been committed over the three years from 2017–18 to 2019–20 to replace three domestic and family violence shelters in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of Pormpuraaw, Cherbourg and Woorabinda.

The government is working with local Aboriginal councils, and existing service providers, to ensure the design of the replacement shelters marries local cultural heritage with the unique needs of the women and children in each community, and the services are integrated with local service systems to ensure a seamless delivery. For example, in Pormpuraaw, an Indigenous architect has been engaged to design a space that reflects these different needs.

In 2015, the department collaborated with the former Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services to deliver two new crisis shelters in Brisbane and Townsville for women and children escaping domestic and family violence. These shelters were opened in December 2015 to provide



Brisbane street art

immediate access to safety and support while women await a refuge placement.

Access to services in rural and regional centres has been identified as an issue for women and children escaping domestic and family violence due to geographic isolation, lack of transport options, limited human services and not having access to their own income.⁴ In 2016, the Queensland Government responded to this need by committing to deliver two rural crisis shelters in Roma and Charters Towers. Service funding of \$4.48 million over four years, and capital funding of \$.4.2 million in 2016–17, has been allocated to provide and operate the new shelters.

These new shelters will be designed, implemented and integrated with other local services required by women and children in need. Co-design workshops were held in both locations, with key partners and stakeholders, to identify the relevant service delivery and building design requirements for each service. A final workshop was held in Brisbane on 12

October 2016 to review the outcomes from these sessions and to finalise a new service delivery model and the physical design of the shelters.

The government will monitor and evaluate the success of the initiatives with a view to modifying them to ensure that families, women and children are able to achieve housing stability and access the range of support they require.

Endnotes

1. Chamberlain C and Mackenzie D 2006, 'Homeless Careers: A framework for intervention', *Australian Social Work*, vol.59, no.2, Melbourne, pp.32–38.
2. Burnet G 2016, 'Housing: More than just bricks and mortar: Domestic Abuse interventions in the Housing Sector', in Hilder S and Bettinson V (eds) *Domestic Violence: Interdisciplinary perspectives on protection, prevention and intervention*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp.227–248.
3. Spinney A 2014, *Family Homelessness: Reducing repeat use of crisis services*, FaHCSIA, Canberra, ACT.
4. Campo M and Tayton S 2015, *Domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote communities: An overview of key issues*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, p.1.

Clean Clothes and Fresh Food Restore Dignity

Department of Housing and Public Works



Minister for Housing and Public Works,
the Honourable Mick de Brenni,
with Orange Sky co-founder Nic Marchesi.

In 2016, the Queensland Government established the inaugural \$2.5 million Dignity First Fund to deliver innovative, non-traditional responses to help Queenslanders experiencing homelessness to live with dignity and improve their quality of life.

A second \$2.5 million funding round was undertaken in mid-2017. In addition to seeking grounded, practical ideas to make a difference to the lives of people experiencing homelessness, proposals that seek to prevent or reduce homelessness through early intervention strategies were encouraged.

Preference was given to proposals that respond to homelessness in regional or remote parts of Queensland and/or deliver services that address the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, young people, women and children escaping domestic and family violence and older people across Queensland.

There was a very strong interest in the Fund with 190 proposals from 163 organisations submitted over the two funding rounds. Of these, 53 projects were approved and are now delivering a wide range of innovative and essential services such as mobile showers and laundries, haircuts, home

welcome packs, food rescue and delivery, health and fitness education, mentoring, and life skills programs delivered through camps or clinics and driving lessons for young people.

The Dignity First Fund helps people who are currently doing it tough to live with dignity, while we work towards longer-term homelessness solutions. The Fund is bringing some great ideas to life and is helping some of Queensland's most vulnerable community members. In the words of The Minister for Housing and Public Works, Mick de Brenni, *'the Fund has proven how much difference you can make with a good idea, a lot of heart and a little money'*.

One of the successful applicants in both the 2016 and 2017 rounds was Orange Sky Australia, formerly Orange Sky Laundry. It was launched in Brisbane in 2014 by Nic Marchesi and Lucas Patchett who came up with the idea to put two washing machines and dryers into a van and wash and dry clothes for free for people who were doing it hard. In 2016, they expanded their services by putting showers into the back of a van.

In 2016, they received \$270,727 in Dignity First funding to operate a mobile laundry van in south east Queensland and a van fitted with two showers in Brisbane. In 2017, they received a further \$115,770 Dignity First funding to operate a laundry and shower van in Townsville. This funding will allow them to continue to help those experiencing homelessness across Queensland and cover their costs of six dollars to wash and dry someone's clothes or provide a hot shower.

Orange Sky demonstrated innovative thinking to ensure people experiencing homelessness maintain

their dignity. This includes harnessing the thermal heat from the van's engine to provide hot water in their showers.

Their services not only provide dignity through practical assistance but through the meaningful human connections they establish when talking to those using the services. One of the most difficult aspects of experiencing homelessness is the sense of loneliness and disconnection from the community. In the one hour it takes to wash and dry someone's clothes, people can sit and engage in meaningful conversations. Orange Sky estimate that their volunteers have over 1,200 hours of positive, non-judgmental conversations with people every week. The conversations and relationships that the Orange Sky volunteers share on the street continue to be the most integral and vital aspect of the services they provide.

Another successful applicant of the 2016 round of funding was SecondBite who received \$281,818 for a van and truck to expand its food rescue operations and deliver approximately 1.2 million more meals annually for people experiencing homelessness, women and families in crisis, and youth at risk in Queensland. SecondBite provides fresh and nutritious food for people in need. Food is donated by farmers, wholesalers, markets, supermarkets, caterers and events and is redistributed to community food programs that support people in need from all walks of life. Orange Sky and SecondBite are just two examples of how the Dignity First Fund helps Queenslanders experiencing homelessness to live with dignity while they get back on their feet. Visit www.hpw.qld.gov.au/Housing for more information on the other services funded through the Dignity First Fund.

Chapter 2: Program, Service and Practice Responses to Homelessness in Queensland

The Benefits of Good Governance

Helen Wood, Chair, Brisbane Youth Service Board

Introduction

The *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*¹ ('the Strategy') commits a \$1.8 billion investment toward improving the current housing situations of the vulnerable. While service delivery is often considered the most practical and worthwhile area for expenditure, a large focus of the Strategy is on prevention and early intervention through investment in corporate governance and strategic business areas. While many see 'feeding the corporate agenda' as an ineffective use of resources and a diversion of funding from service delivery, if done effectively, good governance, strategic leadership and an effective corporate business model increases an organisation's ability to not only do more to assist the vulnerable, but also to deliver services in the most effective way. Ultimately, if we are without effective governance, we are without strategic direction and sustainability.

The purpose of this article is to show a clear link between effective governance and strategic business focus with strong promotion of the core values of the organisation and its service delivery approach. If an effective balance can be created, implemented and maintained then this enables more effective and efficient service delivery in the homelessness sector. This in turn creates a substantial and lasting improvement to the situation of many vulnerable people in Queensland.

Ultimately this article will emphasise the interdependent nature of effective governance and effective service delivery, while also providing an outline of how organisations can better balance these factors so they work in harmony rather than in competition.

The Tension Between Corporate Governance and Service Delivery

With service delivery being historically, and rightly, the core focus of the social services sector, governance is often seen as an impediment to the provision of services and corporate functions as a drain on resources that could be better spent on services and front-line workers.

Governance is often seen as an overhead or a compliance requirement rather than as a genuine value adding function for the organisation. There is often a lack of knowledge about what elements of governance are critical to service delivery and how to integrate governance into service delivery.²

Further discrepancies, perceived or real, exist between the overarching goals of governance and service delivery. While service delivery primarily centres on achieving responsive, rapid action — governance is focussed on ensuring the long-term viability and continued success of an organisation. Often, the perceived divergence of goals for these areas result in organisations viewing the functions as disparate elements that do not work well together. This can lead to these factors being in direct competition for a limited number of resources. If this occurs then it is impossible for organisations to effectively meld these two functions, leading to decreased forward planning and less than effective service delivery.

What is actually most important in this context is that the goals should in fact be linked and shared under the same vision for the organisation. Effective

strategic planning and alignment of goals and aspirations that both areas feel ownership over is essential.

The benefits of governance can be seen in stronger links between the strategic response of an organisation to service delivery challenges. Value is added and gained when an organisation can organise itself more fully to optimise opportunities, strategic partnerships and to consider the key elements to growth and sustainability. Simply put, they can do more with what they have if governance is effective.

This value however, can only be realised if governance is effectively integrated and perceived as adding value by all members of the organisation, including those on the front line of service delivery.

An example of the need to integrate governance more effectively with service delivery is seen through a review of the actions of the Wiluna Government, a Shire in regional Australia with high levels of homelessness, poor health and wellbeing, a lack of elderly care facilities, child neglect, poor education outcomes, alcoholism, violence and poverty.³ Reviews of government practices found that service delivery outcomes had been unsuccessful due to inconsistent governance policies. Poor governance had created a lack of integration and coordination between departments, causing service delivery to be inconsistent and often not occurring at all.

As a result of this, new practices were put in place to develop consistency between governance and service delivery. This case highlights the consequences that

result from under valuing governance, particularly when considering the social services sector, which requires widespread communication and understanding about organisational direction and viability. This case also highlights the symbiotic nature of these two factors, as they allow for cohesion, coordination and integrated forward planning among a number of departments or functional units — which is crucial when considering the number of individuals and teams often involved in service delivery.

When considering the recent release of the Queensland Government's housing strategy, it is evident that finding a balance of governance and service delivery will be crucial. A focus on long-term outcomes and prevention means that the processes and practices put in place must be sustainable and able to be repeated over time, all the while lessening the reactive nature of services. We do not want to just respond to homelessness; we want to eliminate it.

In order to create sustainable processes that will also bring about sustainable service delivery benefits, governance must be a core focus. This focus enables service delivery processes to be consistent and efficient across departments and organisations. Effective governance practices should include appropriate separation between board and executive functions; clear policies and procedures on all aspects of service delivery; human resources and other organisational functions; strategic and operational risk management; fiscal due diligence and sustainability; and informed executive oversight of all functions of the organisation. Done correctly, focus in these areas avoids the problems highlighted in the Wiluna case study and instead facilitates more effective service provision that aligns with organisational goals and corporate structures in a sustainable way.

A Key to Balancing Corporate Governance and Service Delivery

While it is evident that a shared approach between governance and service delivery reaps rewards for an

organisation, a balanced view can be hard to achieve.

In thinking this dilemma through, it is helpful to reflect on the fact that organisations typically operate over three levels — *Strategic, Tactical and Operational*. In order to strike a balance between the commitment to governance and delivery there must be a clear line of sight from strategy to operational execution and how the day to day actions of staff feeds into, and is reflective of, the strategic agenda.

At the executive level, establishing a clear line of sight will create a process for decision-making that sets and aligns organisational direction and expectations. This will ensure that corporate governance processes and overall organisational objectives are defining strategy and not hindering it. Ensuring a clear line of sight does not just inform strategy — it asserts that operational actions and decisions directly impact on the organisation's overall strategy in an everyday sense.

This approach ensures that strategic governance at the executive level and service delivery at an operational level are working cooperatively and in harmony to achieve the same overall goal. By demonstrating, talking about and linking a clear line of sight for all staff, organisations can ensure that governance and service delivery are focused on the same outcomes albeit via different contributions. This in turn eliminates resource competition, elevates the importance of service delivery and practice methodologies and ultimately enhances outcomes for clients.

In a more pragmatic sense, having a clear line of sight also helps employees to recognise what is expected of them in their roles, and the potential positive or negative ramifications that their performance can have on the organisation. This greater insight into individual roles and expectations allows employees to take initiative and respond rapidly and appropriately to changes without instruction from their managers. Successful service delivery outcomes are more likely to occur as a result of increased employee autonomy, as the organisation is able to remain flexible and respond to changes in the market or with clients.

Conclusion

Governance and service delivery must no longer be viewed as separate, and often conflicting, factors competing for organisational resources and focus. Ultimately, in order for the community services sector to thrive and achieve its intended outcomes including lowering homelessness rates and improving the situations of vulnerable clients, a shift toward embracing governance and service delivery as symbiotic forces must occur. To achieve this, organisations must provide clear line of sight to their employees that celebrates both good governance and a maturing practice model that delivers for vulnerable clients.

Ultimately, if an organisation in this sector is not able to achieve its outcomes, it is not able to assist vulnerable clients to its full potential even with great staff and a mature practice approach. It is through collaboration that both governance and practice can coexist to see substantial statistical improvement in the rate of homelessness and to provide clear link to relevant strategies such as the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*.⁴

While it is tempting to think that a focus on governance may only seem to deliver benefits for the organisation, the greatest benefit of this balance is that it can create substantial and lasting positive developments for the lives of our most vulnerable.

Endnotes

1. Department of Housing and Public Works 2017, *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*, Queensland Government, p.13.
2. *Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion Programme*, unpublished working draft, *Understanding the Linkages between Governance and Service Delivery in Meghalaya: A Literature Review*, Meghalaya Institute of Governance, p.5.
3. Lange C 2005, *Local Governance in Remote Regions — Models and Issues: Governance and Service Delivery in Wiluna*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra, p.4.
4. Department of Housing and Public Works 2017, op cit.

U1R Brisbane: A Synthesis of Collaboration and Imagination

Dominic Hale, Jenny Schulz, Travis Radunz and Fiona Caniglia, Under 1 Roof

Under 1 Roof (U1R) Brisbane is a multi-agency service integration initiative that draws together front-line service providers from diverse agencies in collaborative planning to achieve housing and support outcomes. The agencies involved are from both government and non-government sectors, including services from housing and homelessness sectors as well as specialist support services from areas such as mental health and substance use.

U1R began in 2006 and first pioneered case coordination meetings in March 2010, that are targeted to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness. U1R harnesses front-line resources and skills to drive service integration that is focussed entirely on the person or household needing assistance. U1R moves beyond abstract discussions about collaboration to tangible and practical actions that assist people.

Care Coordination as a Process: The Model

Success in securing housing and support outcomes is attributable to U1R's care coordination model. This approach has evolved over seven years to include a fortnightly meeting attended by front-line staff who are invited to make referrals using an agreed referral and assessment form.

As an initial priority, the referral form includes guidance for seeking and obtaining informed consent to discuss the situation at the U1R meeting, to ensure respect for client confidentiality and promote a more person-centred and informed approach. The referral process assesses needs and issues and determines if a multi-agency case coordination process might assist.

Case coordination is not always required. Referrers are requested to determine if case coordination will be beneficial by establishing if one or more of the following are present:

- the person has multiple, intersecting/interacting needs or issues
- the person has experienced recurring episodes of homelessness or long-term homelessness
- the person has experienced one or more examples of a housing placement deteriorating or ending, including rapid cycling in and out of housing and homelessness
- the person is currently housed and their tenancy is failing or vulnerable

- the practitioner involved with the person would find peer support and multi-agency input beneficial because the situation is complex and/or there are difficulties sustaining a relationship between the agency and the person
- the client has been circulating between agencies and would benefit if their profile was raised across agencies working on a collaborative plan of action.

U1R encourages front-line workers to continue to progress collaborative work directly with other agencies and not to wait for a meeting to initiate planning or intervention. Meetings can then be used to present the case, discuss



Brisbane street art



Brisbane street art

options and make agreements about a plan of action.

Meetings work best when participants (service providers) contribute at one or more levels:

- *direct involvement*: a contribution of specific actions that directly benefit a client
- *specific expertise*: a contribution of specialist expertise, knowledge or experience that can help even if the worker is not directly involved
- *community of practice*: a contribution as a community of peers providing support, ideas, reflections and learning.

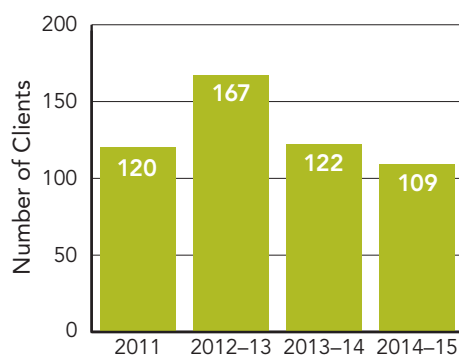
U1R has evolved by using a community development methodology with a focus on building relationships as well as supportive structures such as meetings, learning events and setting up a leadership group. It is an approach that has worked to move beyond established service norms and relationships towards the synthesis of diverse ideas, perspectives and contributions.

This approach further recognises the importance of empathy in building

purposeful relationships, including between service providers across multiple sectors. Participants might be at different starting points, but the process has helped those involved to agree on a shared body of work as a basis for developmental progress. There can be different views on solutions, but facilitated dialogue draws people closer to the best possible solution and supports them in working harmoniously to achieve a positive result.

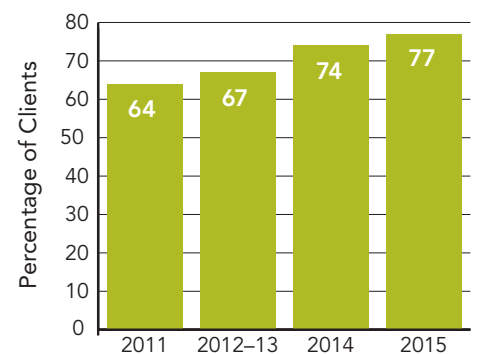
What are the Benefits?

U1R continues to monitor outcomes and between 2011 and 2015 the following data for 518 referrals was recorded:¹



Number of Client referrals to U1R by year

Note: 2012-2013 reflects a period of 18 months.



Clients assisted with an improved housing outcome (%)

Other notable trends include:

- by 2015, the proportion of men and women was almost equal
- the proportion of young people has increased and by 2015 they represented 37 per cent of the total clients referred
- in 2015 25 per cent of clients recorded three or more complex issues and 76 per cent experienced two or more complex issues
- there has been a slight reduction in the number of cases referred in 2015 reflecting the growth in case coordination groups in Brisbane and also that clients are retained for longer to consolidate support arrangements.

This data shows a steady increase in clients recording positive housing outcomes and that clients referred are experiencing a level of complexity that warrants a multi-agency response.

The benefits of U1R case coordination are multifaceted. The primary focus of the group is to achieve and sustain real outcomes for people who may otherwise 'fall through the cracks' of the service system. U1R has become a place of connection for workers from a variety of sectors that are touched by homelessness, including but not limited to specialist homelessness services, housing services, youth services, alcohol and other drug services, and mental health services.

U1R has the potential to provide a peer support function for workers in challenging situations, to assist in maintaining hope in the face of pressure, time constraints, crises and adversity. By making the processes required to suitably house tenants transparent to all group members, direct support providers and housing providers also develop empathy for each other's role. In utilising a collective problem solving approach, U1R overcomes service silos, providing opportunities for mutual learning and contribution to help navigate and overcome challenges generated by systems level issues, resource deficits and client circumstances. U1R also helps to develop and strengthen practice in a supportive and collegial environment.

At the board-level, U1R creates opportunities to effect system-level change between organisations, as challenges experienced by workers on the ground are 'filtered up' to the board members for discussion and a multi-agency response.

What are the Next Challenges for Further Improvements?

As a dynamic multi-agency response, there are always new frontiers and endless scope for innovations that leverage from strengthened relationships and supportive structures. Some challenges include:

Resources:

Workers/organisations are often time-poor, and when working with clients experiencing crisis, it can be

difficult to attend a set meeting time/day each fortnight. There is also an ongoing challenge to secure resources for case coordination work itself.

Succession Planning

A consortium of organisations is always dynamic and workers come and go from key roles. As front-line and senior workers change, different levels of interest and commitment can occur. There is a risk for succession when a worker leaves. There is also currently a long-term role in place providing coordination support within U1R and work is currently underway to strengthen succession when this role or front-line workers move from their positions thus ensuring greater strength over time.

Greater involvement of persons experiencing homelessness

A persistent challenge in case co-ordination is balancing the need for services to be able to quickly and honestly discuss barriers to sustainable housing while centralising the experience of the person experiencing housing strain. Without the individual person being the key agent of change, the sustainability of any housing outcome can be jeopardised. U1R practices careful informed consent however people who are referred do not necessarily want to participate in meetings themselves. This is an area of further investigation and consideration and U1R is always seeking new ways to strengthen the person's role in the process of change.

Data collection systems

A shared data platform geared to recording and reporting on collaborative multi-agency work is an important future goal for U1R. Data is essential to tracking successes, identifying areas for improvement and establishing opportunities for measuring cumulative impact across regions where case coordination groups are present.

Maintaining Enthusiasm

Working with clients with complex needs in crisis situations can lead to feelings of hopelessness, and workers attending U1R are no exception. When a client's

situation is really challenging, and structural barriers are in the way of a successful outcome, it can be difficult to maintain enthusiasm in the meetings. A conscious effort on the part of all workers in attendance to maintain that energy can help to mitigate this challenge, as can acknowledging where the energy is lacking and working together to get things back on track.

What are the key elements of success for others thinking about something similar?

The key elements of success are:

- skilled facilitation
- shared tools and resources
- clear communication pathways
- ongoing relationship building and support for meeting structures
- mutuality and respect among workers
- a program of learning and development
- leadership support from all agencies
- a central and shared coordination worker.²

Conclusion

The consortium has evolved since 2006 to practice fortnightly case coordination meetings, regular learning events and leadership meetings that guide and support further progress. The model has assisted over 500 clients through collaborative assessment, planning and intervention and freely offers information, tools and resources to other regions where there is replication interest. In the future we will seek to improve data collection and reporting and continue meaningful dialogue on practice issues including informed consent. Case coordination could be considered a way of unlocking regional capacity for service integration and helping to harness service system elements and resources in ways that directly benefit clients.

Endnotes

1. Visit <http://www.under1roof.org.au/publications-and-resources/> for more updates on data reporting and other resources.
2. U1R agencies commit resources to maintain a one day per week position to provide coordination support.

Responding to Stigma

Chris Deighton, Operations Manager Queensland, Accommodation and Housing Services,
The Salvation Army Australia Eastern Territory

The research is clear, labels like 'homeless' or 'client' restrict people with disabilities.

As we know, stigma and labels can have a significant negative affect on people. This can be especially true within the homelessness or mental health sectors. It was interesting to explore how many people accessing a specialist homelessness service actually considered themselves to be 'homeless' — and if so, does this self-perception have an overall impact on their wellbeing?

We explored this issue recently by undertaking research with The University of Queensland within one of The Salvation Army's largest centres. *We found that 55 per cent of people staying in homeless*

accommodation provided by The Salvation Army identified as 'homeless', and 31 per cent rejected that label.' This presents some interesting data, as you have to identify as being in a 'homeless' situation in order to receive support. The research went on to further explore this issue in relation to people's wellbeing relative to their homeless label. *In our research, we found that the wellbeing of people who refused to define themselves as 'homeless' was significantly higher than the wellbeing of those who had adopted the label to describe themselves.*² Similarly with mental health, it appears that, 'when we adopt a label to describe ourselves, we start to think and act in ways that align with the stereotypes of that label'.³

This opens up an interesting question; can we have some profound impact by simply changing the language we utilise and subsequently, how we present our services and practice to people?

Over a number of years now, The Salvation Army in Queensland through its Accommodation and Housing Services has been doing exactly that — challenging how we communicate and engage within our practice with people, not homeless clients.

A number of interesting questions have been raised in undertaking this journey:

- Do we see a 'homeless client' or do we see a person seeking accommodation support?



Brisbane street art

- Do people or services have lower expectations of people who are labelled as being 'homeless'?
- Do we actually believe a person can and will overcome, and is this reflected in the language we use and how we engage?
- Therefore, can or do our actions, our words and our thinking, inadvertently restrict people's outcomes?

While these initial questions may seem simple and obvious, when you take these questions across all aspects of support, it opens up a language labyrinth that directly frames and informs service provision.

How we initiate engagement with somebody, especially from first point of contact, directly informs the ongoing support relationship. When someone walks into a 'specialist homelessness service' for the first or subsequent time, what impact does this have on the person? What does it take to walk into a service and take on the label of 'homeless' in order to receive assistance? What does it take to resist the title 'homeless'? More importantly, what can we do so that you do not need to label yourself in order to receive support?

These are the complexities of our work that have framed our thinking and subsequently some of the changes we have seen within our services over the past few years.

What is the change we need to see? In our experience, the change is both in how the person perceives themselves; and also how the service presents and engages with the individual. This change starts with the service provider.

The language we use needs to have impact right from the start, permeating all aspects of service delivery, even prior to initial engagement. We have had to consider how we provide language via our policies, procedures and practices. We need to present our services, through all that we do, with language that provides hope and encouragement whilst also challenging the persons' self-perceptions.



Brisbane street art

When you come into our service, you are not coming in to secure a bed as a homeless person for the night. In fact, you are coming into a service that does not self-identify as a homelessness service, but rather, as a place that provides accommodation integrated with an environment for transformation. We seek to break down barriers, to unpack life together. We want to work at a deeper level with individuals. We see people, not only as survivors of circumstance, but as so much more than that. Yes we unpack vulnerability and needs, but we also focus on skills and abilities. We help people to explore what works best for them, understanding that they are *the* expert in their life — exploring the issues that impact on their life (vulnerabilities) whilst assisting to identify what can be done to overcome challenges on a daily basis.

We also learn from people. We see opportunities for shared discovery where we grow and learn from each other. We do not see ourselves as the expert in someone else's life. We do not want to diminish the person's own agency. By working this way we can see that we are not all that different from each other. We all go through these trials, we all struggle, at different times in our lives. We all want something different or have dreams and aspirations for our future.

We are all on this journey together and at times, need each other. We are in fact interdependent. As one of our reframed practice principles states: *we see ourselves as being on a life journey of sameness, we resist seeing people through the lens of their current and past challenges.*

How we see and present ourselves dictates how we work with people and subsequently how they may see themselves. If we frame the context of our work within the framework of the 'homelessness' label, then we have the potential to restrict people's outcomes. We need to continually ask: How do we expect people to break away from the narratives of their circumstances if we continue to remind them of these through the language and labels that we use?

Let's keep challenging how we frame our language, and by doing so, challenge ourselves and the people we are so blessed to come in contact with through our work.

Endnotes

1. *The Conversation*, What's in the name 'homeless'? How people see themselves and the labels we apply matter. May 23, 2017 <http://theconversation.com/whats-in-the-name-homeless-how-people-see-themselves-and-the-labels-we-apply-matter-69282>
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*

Including All, Working Together: Partnerships in 2017

Hazel Bassett, Team Leader, Gold Coast Homeless Health Outreach Team,
Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service
and Liz Fritz, Patron, Gold Coast Homeless Network Inc.

In his *Parity* article, *Homelessness Policy: Where to now?*, Associate Professor David MacKenzie, argued that homelessness continues to be a significant issue facing our society.¹ Both the number of people seeking assistance and the cost of that assistance has spiralled in the last decade. This, in turn has placed pressure on the services that provide support — so many people and such limited funding.

However, while this is the case for the services, what is often missed is the reality of homelessness for those who are homeless. The human toll of homelessness and the trauma it brings is rarely recognised or considered by governments or policy makers. For those tasked with the job, providing mental health care to those experiencing homelessness can be a difficult assignment.

In 2010, we argued for partnerships among all types of services, both government and non-government, to provide the backdrop for flexible service delivery.² Partnerships allowed the crossing of traditional boundaries and the ability to be creative when working with people experiencing homelessness who were also experiencing a myriad of other issues, including poor mental health.

So, what does mental health service delivery now look like on the Gold Coast? Are partnerships still the answer for being able to provide timely and client focused care? The answer is a resounding 'yes!' Partnerships are still proving to be the vehicle through which several client needs are addressed. Do the partnerships look the same as they did in 2017? The answer is 'no'. Organisations have come and gone. Government agencies have restructured and their focus has often

altered. However, the desire to work in partnership has not waned.

The Gold Coast Homelessness Sector continues to strive to work together with the aim of providing the services that 'best fit' for the person seeking the service. Within mental health care provision, partnerships are the key for engaging people. When services have a working relationship with mental health services, they can provide the conduit to connect the mental health service with the person.

This enables the provision of mental health services within the premises of the other service so that the mental health care is provided in a safe place, not a sterile, clinical place. It also means that mental health services can be provided while other services are being provided, leading to holistic care.

The other advantage of providing this care within the other service is the increase of mental health literacy among workers of that service. This



leads to the workers being able to manage people experiencing issues with their mental health and have a higher tolerance for behavioural issues that may occur as well. It also means that the workers can identify what is a mental health issue, and refer to mental health services in a timelier way that benefits the client.

There are also other forms of partnership that occur that facilitate appropriate care for people experiencing homelessness. Gold Coast Homeless Network continues to oversee partnerships that can assist people experiencing complex issues into long-term housing. In the lead up to the Commonwealth Games, the Gold Coast Network is working hard to house our more vulnerable people through the Advance to Zero Panel. The panel consists of member of the Coalition of Specialist Homeless Services and aims to identify and house those who are experiencing complex needs including mental health concerns. The focus of the

panel is not only to identify people for housing, but also to identify and wrap services around the person as he or she enters housing. Services that will support the person to maintain their accommodation thus ending the cycle of homelessness for the person. The idea is that the services are not static but instead will come and go and change depending on the need — flexible partnerships in action meeting the needs of the individual.

Ted's Story

Ted's story is a good example of this. Ted had been rough sleeping on the coast for many years. Estranged from his family who live on the coast, Ted had engaged with the Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT) for a number of years. Through Rosies Street Mission, HHOT had been able to build a relationship with him. Ted was diagnosed with schizophrenia along with a co-occurring alcohol misuse disorder.

Ted had not had treatment for a number of years and his mental state increased his vulnerability on the streets. Slowly but surely, through his engagement with Rosies and then with HHOT, he agreed to treatment. HHOT worked with the local pharmacy to organise a payment scheme for his medications with which Ted was happy. He also linked with the Gold Coast Homeless Hub to explore accommodation options.

Ted was considered at the Advance to Zero Panel and a Department of Housing seniors unit became available for him in an area where he wished to live. With the assistance of HHOT and the Salvation Army, he has been able to move into the unit.

He is so happy to be off the streets. At his age, he was starting to find it hard to sleep on the ground or in cramped spaces. He has also reported that his mental health has improved, particularly as he is able to receive his medication regularly.

HHOT continue to be involved in his care and he still attends outreach venues as he still has friends on the street. However, he has been able to maintain his space 'as his space' and does not invite others in.

HHOT are also looking into engaging another service to provide practical daily living support. Ted is excited about this and believes this will help him maintain his unit. He disclosed to his HHOT case manager that he has not cooked or cleaned in over 20 years. Recently, he made contact with his family and plans to spend Christmas with them.

Are partnerships important? Yes! As one organisation, we can only achieve so much. However, when organisations work together to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, much more can be achieved than with one organisation on its own. Not only do the organisations win, most importantly, the clients win.

Endnotes

1. MacKenzie D 2017, Homelessness Policy: Where to Now?, *Parity*, vol.30, no.6, pp.17–20
2. Fritz E and Bassett H 2010, Including All, Working Together: The Provision of Mental Health Care in the Homeless Sector, *Parity*, vol.23, no.6, pp.44–45



Brisbane street art

YFS Logan: Embedding Housing Responses Throughout a Multi-disciplinary Organisation

Judith Hunter and Christine Grose, YFS Logan

Over the past five years, YFS in Logan has been overwhelmed with requests for help from people who are homeless or at significant risk of losing their housing.

Last financial year, YFS Connect dealt with almost 6,000 contacts relating to housing, homelessness or tenancy issues. Our specialised housing support services can only work with 214 adults and people each year. Clearly, this is nowhere near the demand for help with housing in our area.

In an attempt to fill this gap, YFS has reconfigured our organisation and changed the way we work so that we can support as many people as possible to keep or achieve stable housing. We have invested in responding to the acute needs of people for help with housing in several ways, including:

- prevention strategies for people who are at immediate risk of losing a tenancy
- short-term and crisis responses for people who are already homeless
- embedding housing capacity in all our case management teams, regardless of target group.

The Context

YFS operates in Logan, south of Brisbane. Over the past 30 years, YFS has grown into a significant service provider in Logan and surrounds, offering services in housing, domestic and family violence, family support, employment preparation, mental health, disability, youth engagement, legal and financial capability.

Logan is a diverse area, with a number of suburbs experiencing very significant disadvantage and high concentrations of public housing. Logan has relatively affordable housing and many funded support services. However, there are some

significant gaps. For example, Logan has no homeless hub, very limited crisis accommodation and limited homestay services.

Embedding Housing Support Across our Organisation

As Figure 1 shows, the people who contact YFS Connect last year often had overlapping presenting issues, with housing, homelessness or tenancy issues and financial problems the most common.

YFS has developed capacity in all our case management teams so that caseworkers can support people to find stable housing while also addressing their other issues. For example, our Intensive Family Support service routinely works with families who are homeless and have child safety concerns to secure housing and improve family

functioning. Similarly, our Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) team, our Youthlink workers and our ParentsNext employment preparation staff routinely help clients resolve significant housing issues.

This means that homelessness is not a barrier to receiving a YFS service.

Last year, YFS began to measure cross-organisation outcomes in three areas: housing stability, financial security and social connectedness. These three factors are essential elements of independence and participation. So far, we have had the greatest impact on clients' housing status.

Of 967 YFS clients surveyed on entry to our programs in 2016–17, 15 per cent were homeless and 34 per cent were at risk of homelessness (Figure 2). Only half of

Figure 1: YFS Connect Presenting Issues 2016–17

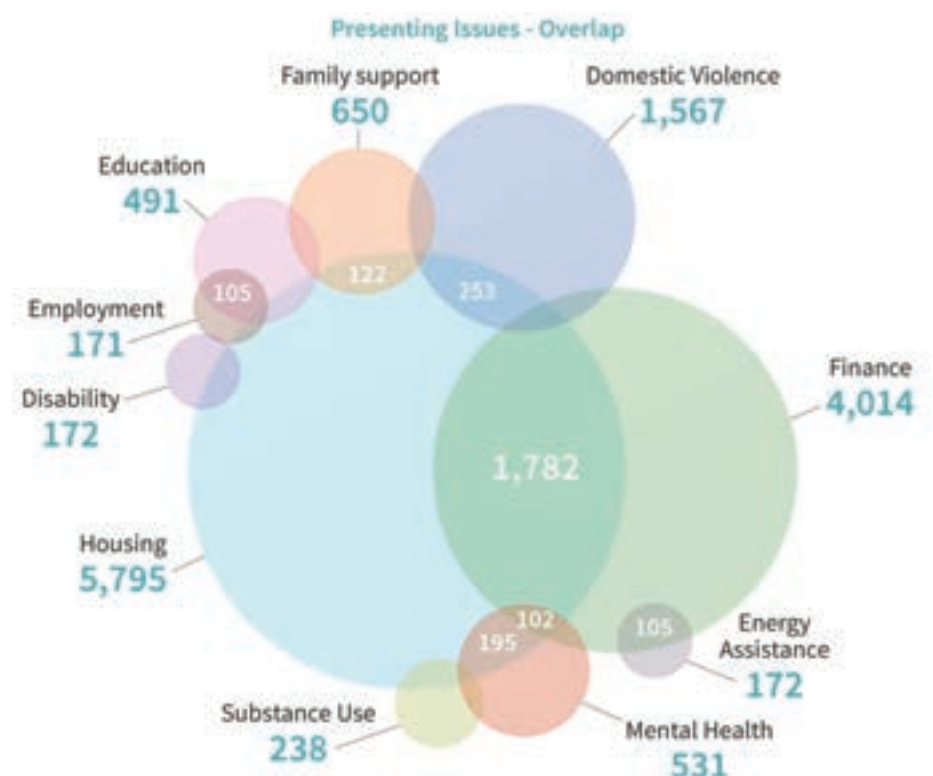
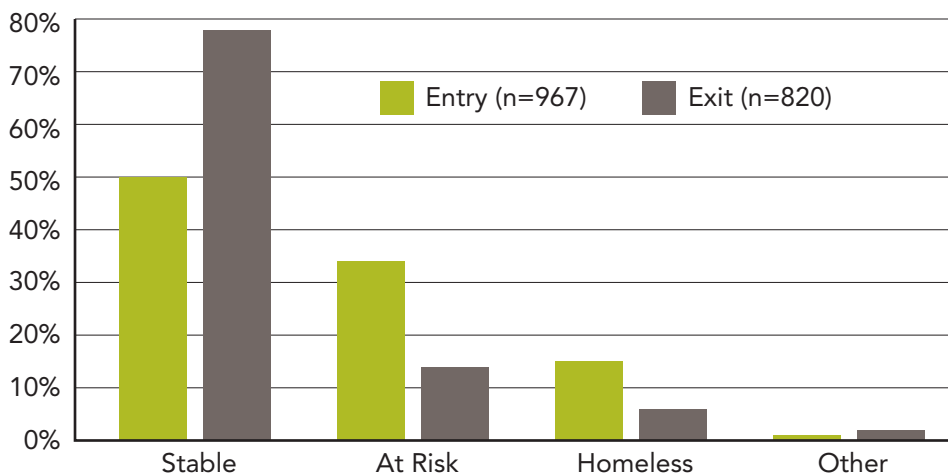


Figure 2: Organisational outcomes data — housing 2016–17



all clients were in stable, safe, affordable housing. By the time they exited from our services, 78 per cent were in stable housing, and only six per cent remained homeless. Many of those who remained homeless had disengaged or lost contact with us for various reasons.

YFS' Approach to Homelessness and Housing

In 2009, YFS initiated a single front door approach to test a better approach to customer service for our clients. Prior to this, all our teams had separate referral, intake and assessment processes. With up to 20 funded programs, this approach was fragmented and inefficient. We were as siloed as our funding bodies.

Over the past eight years we have refined our front door function. It is now known as YFS Connect, and incorporates initial assessments, information, referral, crisis responses and short-term assistance. YFS Connect has enabled us to link more people with a service that can help them, particularly people experiencing homelessness. It is where our work in preventing homelessness and responding to crises happens.

YFS Connect is not a funded homelessness hub, but a triage and assessment function for the organisation and community. YFS subsidises it because of the benefits it offers clients and our organisation.

Preventing Homelessness

Several years ago, YFS made a decision to focus our emergency relief provision where it was most needed — housing and homelessness. YFS Connect administers our emergency relief program. Our financial capability and capacity workers are also based at YFS Connect, allowing us to work with people facing eviction on a budget to work out whether their current housing is affordable. If it is, we advocate with real estate agents or landlords to set up payment plans to address arrears, tipping in some of our emergency relief funds to demonstrate commitment to the plan. We benefit from a partnership with QSTARS who have located a team in our offices, providing quick access for people with tenancy issues to get advice to address these quickly.

Short-term Responses

YFS Connect helps people who have no options to access crisis accommodation. Unfortunately, this often means leaving Logan and their support networks including family and schools, due to the lack of local crisis beds. We have also had success recently helping people to establish private rentals, sometimes supporting them with rent in advance to achieve this. We are developing relationships with local real estate agents to facilitate this work to provide a faster response for people than going into the 'system'.

Brittany's story



Brittany, 19, was five months pregnant and considering adoption when she came to YFS in September 2015. As a consequence of an abusive relationship she was struggling with mental health issues and needed help finding a place to live. Through support from YFS' Step-by-Step family support program, Brittany improved her mental health and found a house where she lives with her son.

Mavis' story



Mavis, 48, is a single parent. She came to YFS in August 2016 following a friend's recommendation. She was homeless, experiencing depression and anxiety. Case-workers from YFS' PHaMs mental health recovery team helped Mavis move into permanent housing, address her mental health issues and regain her confidence.

Panapa's story



Panapa, 61, came from New Zealand 23 years ago, looking for new opportunities. Last year he had to stop working due to serious health issues. He was referred to YFS by Queensland Housing in September because he fell behind on his rent. Panapa now has a new place to live. He's happier, his confidence has improved and he credits his YFS MoneySmart worker's support for all the changes in his life.

IT Solutions in Homelessness: Partnering with Business

Elizabeth (Liz) Fritz AM, Patron, Gold Coast Homelessness Network Inc
and 7CareConnect Project Manager for GCHN

A Local Focus, Real-time, Interactive, Web Based Application

Over many years' the Gold Coast Homelessness Network Inc (GCHN) has embraced and promoted innovation as a way to meet its objectives to support and assist people to end their homelessness, and to develop prevention and early intervention strategies for people at risk of homelessness. The GCHN has actively sought the support of government agencies, business, service clubs, sporting clubs and community services, and built strong partnerships, delivering significant support to the homelessness sector.

After meeting and working with Dr. Hung Eddywing, Chief Executive Officer of GMO Alliance and Associates, the GCHN is excited and proud to bring the 7Care Connect — Homelessness application/navigation tool to the Gold Coast community. This has been enabled through the generosity of GMO Alliance and Associates, and demonstrates corporate social responsibility that will benefit our community into the future. GMO and its corporate partners have displayed a high level of understanding of the circumstance of some of the most vulnerable people in our community, embracing and demonstrating the values of Dignity, Respect, Fairness and Choice in their work. Our shared goal is to have a more accessible and seamless service delivery experience for vulnerable consumers across the following areas:

- safety
- accommodation
- support
- learn/earn
- food
- health
- social.

The first stage of the 7CareConnect — Homelessness project was delivered by GMO Alliance and Associates in partnership with the GCHN, in record time with zero funding. The project work began in earnest on September first 2016 with strong commitment and excitement from all involved. This first stage was entirely supported by pro bono and in-kind support from GMO Alliance and Associates, along with voluntary project management and administration support, helped to meet the GCHN's responsibilities in the project. The Rotary Club of Broadbeach, Queensland partnered with us to provide support to the consumer workshop held on the 'go live' date of 20 February 2017.

With the project now requiring financial support for its ongoing development and maintenance the GCHN made a successful submission to the Queensland Government Department of Housing and Public Works DIGNITY FUND for funds to support the hosting and support to the website for a two-year period.

This web based, real time application/navigation tool, set in Google Maps displays service locations and information to consumers, service providers and the general community. It can be accessed using a Smart Phone, or any device that has access to the internet.

Research tells us that 95 per cent of people experiencing homelessness in Australia have a smart phone.¹ However, it is acknowledged that staying connected can be challenging at times, with local homeless people telling us that phone charging and having phone credit are the two main

barriers to connectivity. Wifi access points are now available in many locations for consumers without phone credit. Gold Coast City Libraries has welcomed people who are homeless to use the library facilities, including charging phones and devices, and has embraced the project by having a link directly to the 7CC website on computers for consumers and staff alike. Gold Coast Centrelink offices offer the same service through the client consoles for homeless customers.

The Notification and Request functions enable people to be informed in a timely way and therefore to benefit from the resources and in-kind services that potentially exist for people in our community who are homeless. The webpage provides more information including short training videos to support consumers using the application for the first time, making the application very user friendly.

Benefits include:

- the availability of the application can reduce the anxiety associated with trying to find services when a vulnerable person or family is in distress and requiring support and accommodation
- the visual display in Google Maps makes it easier for the consumer to locate services, and is especially beneficial for those with poor literacy and/or anxiety and depressive symptoms
- the consumer has access to contact details for a service and a short description of the services on offer. This allows them to more easily navigate the service system in a timely manner, and have choice about who they wish to receive services from. It reduces the need for the consumer to 'ring around' to services to find out what they can offer, giving

consumers a stronger sense of control over what is happening in their lives

- a link to the 'Translink Journey Planner' makes it easier for the consumer to find their way to the service, as well as to meet their travel requirements as they participate in community activities, employment and education, and engage in social activity
- the SOS link on the 'landing page' gives immediate dial-in to 'emergency' contacts for example, Police; 000; Domestic Violence (DV) Connect
- consumers are able to send and receive general requests regarding service availability
- consumers can receive notifications from the 7CareConnect administrator and/or the service provider with whom they are engaged.

Service Provider Support:

- 7CareConnect — Homelessness enhances service delivery by reducing the impact on the service of having people calling to find out 'what they do'.
- The opportunity for members of the GCHN to work with GMO Alliance and Associates professionals, has resulted in a broadening of the knowledge and skills of those homelessness services through collaboration and broader understanding of information technology and what it can deliver to vulnerable groups in our society.
- 7CareConnect — Homelessness equips community members and agency workers at all levels of Government to assist people experiencing homelessness when they come in contact through their work and social activity. We all understand the notion that 'it takes a village', with collaboration at all levels of a community to help break the cycle of homelessness and support people to experience the dignity of having 'A Place to Call Home'.

As well as specialist homelessness services, service providers already registered on the 7CareConnect application include meal service providers, outreach/mobile support services, drop-in centres, health and



Brisbane Street art

disability services, housing services, Queensland Police Service, City Libraries and Active and Healthy programs, DV Connect and more.

The 7CareConnect application is a significant application to ensure people experiencing homelessness receive timely information during major events through the upcoming upgrade to build in a general messaging service. As such, the website is part of the GCHN strategy to support people experiencing homelessness in the lead up to, and during the 2018 Commonwealth Games in the City. A link to a homelessness specific webpage will provide access to the *Demystifying Homelessness* information and awareness video as well as to specific policy and program information, for example, the Gold Coast Homelessness Protocol.

The 7CareConnect application is easily replicated to other regions and

other consumer groups. Interested persons and groups should contact 7CareConnect on the email address provided.

Feedback

'As a mental health organisation we work with people at different stages in their recovery journey and feedback from staff and participants has been positive. For example, a participant who has been homeless for some time has spoken about the value of this website in providing up-to-date resources about available community resources, particularly community meals.'

'The 7CareConnect app allows our volunteers to assist people in need in real time. A single mum of three children rang the office on a Friday, unfortunately our food parcel program and free lunch is on a Thursday and we were unable to assist her with her immediate need. However, over the phone we were able to direct her to the 7CareConnect site and talk her through the options and services available and close to her location that day. 7careconnect is a great site.'

A group of young people indicated they:

'...would have loved to have had access to this App long before now' and some believed that they may not have 'experienced secondary homelessness for the amount of time we did if we had had the App to search for local homelessness and support services.'

Another young person with an intellectual disability provided feedback stating:

'...the App was easy to use' and indicated that they '...liked it using Google Maps and how it can tell you how long it can take (walking or public transport distance and time) you to get to the service you are looking for'.

Endnote

1. Humphry J 2014, 'Homeless and Connected: Mobile phones and the internet in the lives of homeless Australians': https://accan.org.au/files/Grants/homelessandconnected/Homeless_and_Connected_web.pdf

SPER Work and Development Orders: New SPER Laws to Provide Fair and Flexible Fine Options

Paula Hughes, Policy and Casework Lawyer

and Belinda Tang, Seconded Lawyer, Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, LawRight

For many years, LawRight's Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic (HPLC) has identified debts to the State Penalties Enforcement Registry (SPER) as a key legal problem faced by our clients. A new Work and Development Order scheme provides hope to homeless Queenslanders struggling to manage their SPER debts. Whilst this is a welcome change, there is still more work to be done.

Homelessness and Fines

The connection between homelessness and fines is now well established. Offences that are commonly associated with fine penalties, in particular public space and nuisance type offences, disproportionately impact people experiencing homelessness.

Historically in Australia it has been a criminal offence to be a 'vagrant', until as recently as 2005 in the case of Queensland. While these laws have now been repealed, homeless people continue to be one of the most criminalised population groups in Australia.

In 2011 Tamara Walsh in her book *Homelessness and the Law*¹ cites two main reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, there are a number of laws which directly or indirectly target people experiencing homelessness or poverty, such as begging and fare evasion. Secondly, people who are residing in public spaces are significantly more likely to come to police attention. People who are experiencing homelessness report interacting with police on a regular and in some cases daily basis.² For those who are conducting their lives in public, many behaviours which would be lawful within a private home, such as swearing or drinking alcohol, are unlawful when done in public.

Because people experiencing homelessness are unlikely to be able to afford to pay fines when they arise, many incur significant SPER debts, which they are incapable of paying off.

HPLC Casework

A study by LawRight's HPLC suggests that in Queensland as many as 60 per cent of homeless people have a SPER debt.³

An analysis of our SPER casework from the past two years indicates:

- those with a SPER debt had an average debt size of approximately \$5,800
- for those who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, the average debt size was markedly higher, at approximately \$7,000
- the average SPER debt size for women was approximately \$4,800, and for men it was approximately \$6,800.

Under the current legislation, SPER is empowered with a broad range of enforcement options to recover these debts, including licence suspension, redirection of earnings and even imprisonment. SPER also imposes enforcement fees for debts that remain unpaid. As a result, clients who cannot afford to pay their debts are subject to ballooning debt amounts and increasingly severe enforcement measures. This can cause significant distress and further exacerbate the hardship and vulnerabilities of our clients.

New SPER Laws and the WDO Scheme

Until now, the options available to address a SPER debt have been limited and often inappropriate for vulnerable people experiencing hardship. The option to enter into a payment plan offers limited relief for

a person experiencing severe financial hardship with no disposable income. Whilst Fine Option Orders allow people to undertake community service under the supervision of Probation and Parole, many vulnerable people are unable to comply with these orders due to their disadvantaged circumstances, for example disability or health concerns.

After years of advocacy by the HPLC and other stakeholders in the community and community legal sectors, Queensland Parliament has passed new laws to change the way SPER collects debts.

The *State Penalties Enforcement Amendment Act 2017* will introduce a new Work and Development Order (WDO) scheme which will provide a broader range of non-monetary options for people experiencing hardship to address their SPER debts. The new scheme has not yet commenced, but will come into operation on a date to be set by the State Government.

Under the new scheme, if a person has a SPER debt and meets the eligibility criteria, a WDO will allow them to undertake any of the following to satisfy their SPER debt:

- unpaid work for, or on behalf of, an approved sponsor
- medical or mental health treatment under an approved sponsor's treatment plan provided by a health practitioner
- an educational, vocational or life skills course as decided by an approved sponsor
- financial or other counselling as decided by an approved sponsor
- drug or alcohol treatment as decided by an approved sponsor
- if the person is under 25 years of age — a mentoring program as

decided by an approved sponsor; or

- if the person is Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander and lives in a remote area — a culturally appropriate program as decided by an approved sponsor.

A person will be eligible to undertake a WDO if they are unable to pay their SPER debt because they are:

- experiencing financial hardship
- have a mental illness
- have a cognitive or intellectual disability
- are homeless
- have a substance use disorder; or
- are experiencing domestic and family violence.

Much of the detail of the new scheme, including definitions of the above terms, will be determined by future regulations and guidelines.

It is hoped that these changes will alleviate the significant burden of SPER debts on Queensland's homeless, by providing them with a broad range of non-monetary alternatives to address their debts. The scheme may also assist people experiencing hardship to engage with vital services to address their complex needs.

Success and Reflections from New South Wales (NSW)

The Queensland WDO scheme builds on the success of the NSW model. New South Wales was the first state to introduce a WDO scheme in Australia with a two-year pilot program beginning in mid-2009. The pilot became permanent in June 2011. Based on the initial evaluation by the NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice, the results were overwhelmingly positive. Evaluated benefits included: reduced re-offending, engagement of clients with appropriate treatment programs, reduced levels of stress, anxiety and hopelessness for debtors, increase in client skills and an incentive to enter the workforce.⁴

The evaluation showed that 82.5 per cent of WDO clients did not receive another fine since their WDO was approved. Significantly, 40 per cent of the 82.5 per cent were repeat offenders.⁵

Furthermore, general feedback from caseworkers and support agencies found that the scheme had increased client agency, self-esteem and self-efficacy.⁶ The scheme now involves over 2,238 service locations and since 2012 almost \$90 million of debts have been cleared.⁷

Despite the success, stakeholder feedback has shown that administration of the scheme has room for improvement, with the need to streamline applications and reporting processes.⁸ Initial problems were related to backlogs and slow response times of up to two months.⁹ Other recommendations included allocating further resources towards educational and promotional materials for service-providers, with targeted approaches to regional and remote areas and indigenous communities. Interestingly, few sponsors are undertaking mentoring programs, and the reasons for this remain unclear.

In other states, Victoria has also recently introduced a Work and Development Permit scheme and the Australian Capital Territory has a WDO scheme that applies only to debts arising from traffic infringements. Other states are yet to consider reforms and some still use imprisonment as an option for non-payment.

The Bigger Picture: Barriers for the Homeless

Although the WDO scheme is a welcomed reform, the disproportionate average SPER debt for homeless people still begs serious questions about the criminalisation of homelessness, which will not be solved by the WDO scheme alone.

Whilst the WDO scheme is a step in the right direction, the scheme only addresses one piece of the puzzle. The issue remains that the homeless community are more susceptible to receiving fines, due to increased police attention and a suite of offences that disproportionately impact them due to their homeless status. In practice, offences such as begging apply only to people who are homeless or experiencing extreme

financial hardship. Despite this, such offences are typically associated with monetary penalties that our homeless clients have no capacity to pay due to their circumstances. The regular fining of people who have no capacity to pay them further entrenches their disadvantage and also causes unnecessary expense to the fines enforcement system.

In 2008 Clark, Forell and McCarron¹⁰ found that the administrative burden of fines enforcement systems also creates significant barriers for people experiencing homelessness. This includes an inability to manage the enforcement system due to capacity, cognitive or language difficulties, as well as a general lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities. It is our hope that the implementation of the new scheme will seek to address some of these barriers.

By providing for fairer and more flexible options, Queensland's new WDO scheme provides a welcome change for homeless people struggling to address their SPER debts. However, until there are broader changes to the justice system, people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage may continue to struggle with fines and criminalisation.

Endnotes

1. Walsh T 2011, *Homelessness and the Law*, The Federation Press, Annandale NSW, p.76.
2. *ibid* at p.74.
3. QPILCH 2013, *Responding to homelessness and disadvantage in the fines enforcement process in Queensland*, QPILCH, Brisbane.
4. New South Wales Department Attorney General and Justice 2011, *A fairer fine system for disadvantaged people*, Section 8.2.
5. *ibid*.
6. *ibid*, section 8.2.2.
7. Department of Justice NSW 2017, Office of State Revenue, Legal Aid NSW, Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, *WDO News*, Issue. 8, July 2017.
8. New South Wales Department Attorney General and Justice 2011, *op cit* Section 8.2.7.
9. *ibid*.
10. See Clark S, Forell F and McCarron E 2008, 'Fine but not fair: Fines and disadvantage' *Justice Issues paper 3*, Law and Justice Foundation of NSW, Sydney.

Homelessness with HART: Our Story So Far

Jodie Cowie, Coordinator of HART 4000

HART 4000, the Homelessness Assessment and Referral Team, has been working with people who are either currently experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the greater Brisbane City Region.

HART's journey began with the introduction of the 2008 *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* White Paper. We moved on with the introduction of the Housing First Framework and now we are looking forward to working with Queensland Government's newly released *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*. In 2013, HART joined the profit for good community organisation, Community Queensland.

In this brief article, I will highlight, some of the strengths and some of the challenges that we experienced, as well as some of the issues that affect the people we work with.

Since its inception, HART has worked alongside many individuals and families who have experienced homelessness. In the last financial year, HART had contact with over 2,500 individuals and families providing housing and homelessness information and referrals. In addition, HART conducted planned support (case management) with 1,124 individuals and families.

The stark reality is that many people in the greater Brisbane region do not have access to housing or their housing is at risk.

Housing is a basic human right. Providing housing is also a resolvable issue. However, at HART we have found that for many people finding suitable accommodation that is, affordable and available and in a familiar community where there is

connection, very difficult and sometimes impossible.

HART supports both individuals and families to achieve their housing goals. This is the primary focus of our work and planned support. In doing this work we have experienced some challenges. Under a Housing First framework, there is a strong focus on minimising the length of time an individual or family experiences homelessness. Unfortunately, we have found that many people end up in housing limbo and experience homelessness for far too long. This only perpetuates and exacerbates their vulnerabilities and other associated risks.

To put it simply, more suitable housing needs to be made available. This could include looking at models of scattered social housing. We need to extend the availability of and access to mainstream housing within the private rental market with the application of tenancy laws that are fair and equitable for tenants. In the past ten years, we have seen the introduction of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS), and then witnessed its demise. These NRAS properties are highly sought after. In a very competitive rental market, every person is competing to be 'the tenant of choice'. In addition, there is a particular need to support families in sustaining their tenancies. Unfortunately with only minimal supports available, services are reaching capacity very quickly.

For those working at the coalface of homelessness, there is a shared understanding of the sheer difficulty of accessing housing and the lack of available emergency options for families who are experiencing homelessness. At HART what we have found is that individuals are living well below the poverty line, and that even

though they may be receiving unemployment benefits, they are also struggling to end their experience of homelessness.

The lack of suitable housing for this particular demographic is at times appalling. Sometimes the only option available are boarding houses with shared facilities. For some of the most vulnerable, there is the option of shared accommodation but not necessarily with any tenure. An added challenge for many individuals and families wishing to end their experience of homelessness is that they may not be able to stay in their own community. This causes displacement and breaks the connections and supports, and weakens the resiliency they may have within their local community.

However, while all of these challenges sit within in much larger service system and structure, it is not all doom and gloom. In HART's journey so far, we have found much strength in working collaboratively across the human services sector. We work with housing and government as well as integrating services throughout Community Queensland to support people to achieve their goals, obtain suitable housing, sustain their tenancies and connect with appropriate supports. We focus our work on the needs of individuals and families to develop informal supports and social connections.

The work of HART is based on developing relationships and partnerships to achieve effective outcomes for the people who may be experiencing, or who are at risk of homelessness. We are hopeful that with the release of the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*, the next ten years will see homelessness in Queensland considerably reduced.

The Art of Community Work: An Alternative Approach to Reducing Inter-generational Homelessness

Luan Murat, Programs Officer, Mareeba Community Housing Company Ltd

While observing the children of my previous clients, now young adults, walking through the doors of our local community centre, I could not help but wonder how we are falling short in addressing inter-generational homelessness.

I remember a time when these children were filled with brightness and energy that made them indistinguishable from any other happy child. Now they often sit before me with depression written on their bodies, seemingly carrying an invisible load built up over years. Because of this I ask: *What is our role? What are our aims? Where can we improve?*

I still remember the words of a six-year-old girl, who like her parents and grandparents, was experiencing homelessness. When asked what she wished to be when she is older, she replied: 'a doctor'. When asked why, she said: 'I wish to fix my dad; he is broken'. Those few words made me realise the deep and hidden pain caused by the emotional absence of her father. While there physically, his own pain and struggles prevented him from expressing the natural love a parent has for their child.

The continuation of homelessness in her family and for many in her community goes beyond the absence of shelter, and beyond the support provided in completing paperwork and organising referrals. While these forms of support are important and beneficial, it is hearing and listening to the words and stories that people bring that is needed to find a deeper way of working with them to promote the healing that is required.

This article will briefly discuss the limitations of our current approach and propose an alternative way of working to reduce intergenerational homelessness.

In Far North Queensland homelessness is highly prevalent in Indigenous communities, where it is often connected to unemployment and illiteracy. In today's world, homelessness demonstrates an intricate interplay of challenges that are difficult to meet, making homelessness difficult to end. These challenges operate across cultural, environmental, systemic and individual domains. Unfortunately, our current approach homelessness has no specialised response or program that truly addresses its underlying causes.

One of the key inherent weaknesses in our current system is an over-emphasis on providing individual support without making an effort to change the shared environmental conditions that play such a significant role in the reoccurrence of homelessness. Another limitation of our current approach is the belief that a system can solve complex human problems. While systems always have a place, and are useful for coordinating resources and people, they have proven to be incapable of addressing issues which are not solely related to a lack of resources.

Unfortunately, our strong belief in a systemic approach prevents us from focusing on improving the quality of service delivery through the introduction and standardisation of evidence based practices such as strength based work and trauma informed care.

Eliminating intergenerational homelessness begins with changing how we think about community work

and the individual support we provide. One helpful approach, derived from traditional ways of viewing a community, is the idea that while human beings are, by nature, sound and balanced regardless of their ethnicity, they are still always susceptible to physical, mental and spiritual illnesses. We need to appreciate that just as individuals are susceptible to illness, so too are communities.

A reoccurrence of multiple symptoms such as illiteracy, substance misuse, identity crisis and homelessness within a community, indicate the need to support the community to heal and strengthen.

In such a traditional approach, the aim is to not impose 'solutions', but rather to engage with, and support and strengthen the innate healing process that naturally exists to help communities become stronger and more resilient. To ensure its success, this approach requires the government to work in direct partnership with the community. That is, work hand in hand in all the steps of the community approach to reducing homelessness — from developing an understanding the issues, to the development of relevant and appropriate strategies. It is imperative that best practice principles are employed from the community development and other relevant fields.

Finally, we must provide a space for all people who are suffering, just like that young girl I mentioned, to tell their story and to express their pain. This is the first step of the individual and collective journey towards healing. I write this article in the hope I do not see that young girl return, like so have many before her. to my community centre.

Chapter 3: Responding to Homelessness in Regional and Remote Queensland

Delivering Remote Housing that Meets the Needs of Individual Households and Communities

Department of Housing and Public Works

As noted in the following article, overcrowding in remote communities has been reduced by almost half through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH) and National Partnership on Remote Housing (NPRH) program, and we have delivered almost 1,150 homes, almost 1,500 refurbishments and supported maintenance for almost 4,300 houses. The NPRH program has helped build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils and Indigenous businesses in Queensland, who now deliver over 80 percent of housing construction and repairs.

While there is currently uncertainty around the future funding of the NPRH program, it is important to note that any potential cessation of investment would see housing standards in remote communities deteriorate and have lasting impacts on Indigenous health, education and community safety outcomes across Queensland.

Addressing Overcrowding

The Queensland Government has been working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to tackle disadvantage by improving and

maximising housing outcomes and boosting socio-economic advancement through increased employment, training and business opportunities. This has been driven through the Commonwealth funded NPARIH and NPRH.

The government is committed to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*. We will continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver culturally appropriate housing outcomes, and local employment opportunities, to help close the gap on housing disadvantage.

Currently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 14 times more likely to become homeless than non-Indigenous Australians, and their homelessness situations are likely to be more severe.¹ Overcrowding is a significant issue and tends to increase with remoteness.² The gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' rates of specialist homelessness service use, and that of non-Indigenous Australians, has been widening over time, to 9.1 times in 2015–16.³

The government has been working hard to improve the living standards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by reducing tenant overcrowding and homelessness, improving poor housing conditions and alleviating severe housing shortages. While only one fifth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians live in remote areas, this group has the greatest level of housing need.⁴

In the 34 Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, activities relating to the delivery of new social housing dwellings, and the maintenance and refurbishment of existing dwellings, are closely coordinated with the various Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils, to deliver the best outcomes for each community.

Providing these new dwellings contributes to increased employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Indigenous Councils and local businesses, which benefits the local economy. The program of delivery aims to balance capital and maintenance works with the need for sustainable employment in these communities.

For new construction projects, Indigenous Councils are consulted with during the planning, design and construction phases. The choice of housing type in the communities is determined by housing need and influenced by regional housing styles, local conditions and the availability of skilled trades, materials and equipment.

Overcrowding in the communities remains one of the biggest challenges. The typical extended family structure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families often



Low-set housing extension



High-set housing extension

features older people and foster/adoption relationships with children and young people. This can result in large households living in the one dwelling. Not only does overcrowding put stress on household infrastructure, such as food preparation areas and ablution systems, it can also impact people's physical health, through disease and chronic infection. Severe overcrowding was the most common cause of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote Australia.⁵

The Department of Housing and Public Works is addressing overcrowding through the delivery of a housing extension program that provides additional, removable modular buildings, to existing dwellings to increase the property's size. This helps to reduce the pressure on families and mitigates health and safety risks. These housing extension products are also useful where there is little or no available serviced land to build new dwellings, or house lots are affected by family land or native title issues which limit the council's ability to allocate families to more appropriately sized dwellings.

Under NPARIH/ NPRH funding (2008 to 30 June 2017), 853 new dwellings were constructed, and 67 extensions delivered since April 2009. In 2017–18, the government plans to complete another 238 new dwellings under NPRH and 39 new extensions.

The delivery of new social housing dwellings, and housing extension

products, is having a positive effect in reducing overcrowding in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, declining from 36 per cent in 2012 to 24.6 per cent in 2017 (see graph below).⁶ There is also a ripple effect, resulting in stronger and more positive communities.

In Poruma and Warraber, building new dwellings has created a friendly rivalry between the islands, with residents starting to take ownership and pride in their new homes. Residents are beautifying their yards, and creating vegetable gardens, which helps give them a sense of pride in their homes while providing healthy food options.

A local councillor from an island community in the Torres Strait, said residents were extremely grateful and appreciative of the 13 new constructions recently delivered, along with the other seven currently underway. He said the new dwellings would assist to reduce overcrowding in his small but expanding community and create local jobs. He also recognised the benefit that some of the new houses, which will be purpose-built to accommodate people with disabilities, would have on those who receive the property.

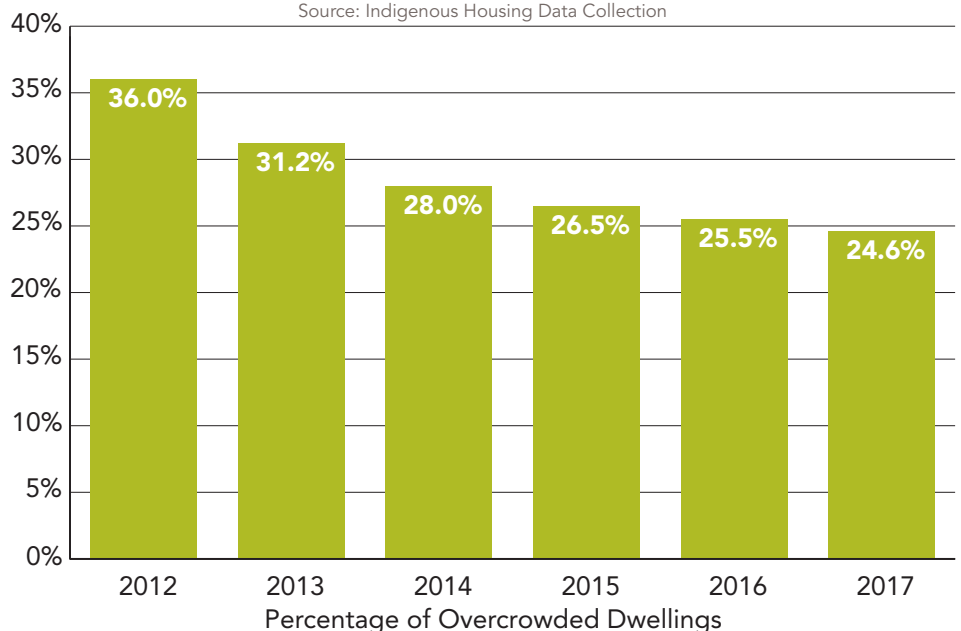
Endnotes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012, *Census of population and housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011*, ABS cat. no. 2049.0. ABS, Canberra.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2014, *Housing circumstances of Indigenous households: Tenure and overcrowding*, Cat. No. IHW 132, AIHW, Canberra. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/contents/clients-in-regional-and-remote-areas>
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2017. *Specialist homelessness services 2015–16*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/contents/client-groups-of-interest/indigenous-clients>.
4. AIHW 2014, op cit.
5. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2014, *Homelessness among Indigenous Australians*, Cat. no. IHW 133, AIHW, Canberra.
6. Department of Housing and Public Works 2017, *Improvement in proportion of overcrowded households*.

Improvement in Proportion of Overcrowded Households

Queensland Indigenous Communities' dwellings at 30th June

Source: Indigenous Housing Data Collection



Cairns Street to Home, Douglas House and Woree Supported Accommodation

Dr Phil Flint, Regional Leader North Queensland, Natalie Musumeci, Program Manager Douglas House and Woree Facility and Mark Jentz, Program Manager Going Places, Mission Australia

Mission Australia (MA) has a number of unique and innovative homeless support services in the Cairns area. These have been specifically tailored to address the needs of this regional community in Far North Queensland. These programs emphasise both wrap-around services and trauma-informed practice. They rely heavily on collaboration with other services and an understanding of and respect for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Going Places Street to Home

Our first and longest running program is the *Going Places Street to Home Program*. *Going Places* began its operation in 2010 and is an initiative of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, (NPAH). The service supports people who are sleeping rough or experiencing chronic homelessness to move into stable, long-term housing. Properties are sourced from the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW), Access Community Housing or the private rental market. Since 2010, *Going Places* has supported over 1,100 clients and housed over 750 adults and 350 children. Significantly, 77 per cent of clients have identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. While homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is a major issue in remote areas (where severe overcrowding is the predominant issue), it is also extremely concerning in regional centres like Cairns and Darwin where people are drawn to services and networks in metropolitan areas.

Through *Going Places*, assistance is provided through assertive outreach, direct support and the coordination of wrap-around support services. The key to the success of *Going Places* is its core belief in the five Housing First

Principles; the consumers' right to choose; the importance of separating the housing from the service provided; matching the needs of the consumer; a focus on recovery based practice; and community integration, with a focus on connecting the people we help to natural supports in the community and a reconnection with family.

In 2016 there was an increasing gap in the provision of outreach health services, largely due to the loss of Queensland Health's Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT). The sector pushed for an increase in outreach health services and the DHPW approached Mission Australia to submit a proposal to expand *Going Places* to include health services. The service agreement was signed off in September 2016 and the team now consists of three nurses, each responsible for mental health, general health and alcohol and other drug support, five Case Workers, an Indigenous Mentor, Financial Mentor,

Senior Case Worker and Program Manager.

Ninety three per cent of clients housed over the program's seven-year lifespan, were sustaining their tenancy at program exit.

In 2013 a cost-benefit analysis of *Going Places* was completed that found that for every one dollar invested by the Government, the government saved \$5.10 in public services no longer required. We believe, the addition of the nursing staff will lead to even greater cost savings for the government.

Douglas House

Although the proportion of tenancies being maintained as clients exited the *Going Places* program was quite high (over 90 per cent) it became evident that there was a cohort of clients struggling with the Housing First model who required supported accommodation, hence the need for



Photo provided by Mission Australia

our Douglas House supported accommodation facility.

Douglas House is a Cairns-based, 22-bed supported accommodation facility that houses people who have experienced rough sleeping and long-term chronic homelessness. It has been operating since 2014. Like *Going Places*, Douglas House predominantly supports people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds who have histories of rough sleeping in the Cairns region. Prior to being accommodated, many of the Douglas House residents were excluded from other services, frequently attended hospital and mental health facilities, and were in regular contact with police for minor offences.

Douglas House works from a trauma-informed framework, which incorporates recovery-oriented, strengths-based and culturally-responsive practices. Douglas House recognises the social, physical, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs of its residents. The Douglas House team develop individual recovery plans in partnership with residents and endeavour to ensure residents do not exit back into homelessness.

Our staff are trained in the Collaborative Recovery Model (CRM). As part of individual case management, recovery workers provide tenants with emotional and practical support, advocacy, and assistance to access housing and specialist services, such as support for substance misuse, mental health recovery, legal advice, domestic and family violence, and other mainstream services. Recovery workers also facilitate access to education, volunteering, employment and leisure activities for tenants.

Group programs complement one-on-one direct service provision. They include cooking, budgeting and debt management assistance, yard maintenance, tenant rights and responsibilities and trauma-informed art therapy. These programs are organised, and in some cases run, by Lifestyle Coordinators. Recovery workers assist tenants to better connect with the community, providing them with a physical orientation of where services are and

helping them to access the services they need. They also help tenants to explore new activities and determine how they can affordably participate in those activities in the community. Recovery workers and Indigenous Mentors develop links to cultural groups and communities, provide active referrals and follow up with services. They provide short-term transport assistance and public transport training, and attend initial meetings and events with tenants as a social support.

Woree Supported Accommodation

Mission Australia extended our capacity in 2015 with the construction of an 18-bed facility in Woree, a southern suburb of Cairns. The new facility has provided longer-term accommodation and a continuum of support for those who need it. We believe this is an important approach from the Queensland government and its Housing Department giving some of the most vulnerable people in our community. The service provides supported housing with individualised case management for adults who have experienced long-term chronic homelessness.

The facility is a stepping-stone, helping tenants develop the skills they need to move from Douglas House or other temporary accommodation into sustainable independent housing. Staff also assist clients to renew their participation in economic and social aspects of community life. The service is funded by DHPW and works from a trauma-informed and recovery focussed model.

Cafe One Van: A Social Enterprise

A new initiative that ties the three programs together by addressing a shared identified gap is our social enterprise Café One. Café One is a mobile coffee van business which offers training and employment options, while providing a safe and supportive environment for people who are homeless or experiencing disadvantage, marginalisation and poverty.

As a mobile social enterprise, Café One is able to attend local events and community activities and therefore facilitate wider engagement with the community. Café One provides opportunities for people to come together, develop relationships, forge stronger social connections, and build networks and support. We hope this results in improved understanding between our clients and the community. Since opening in October 2016 Café One has run three barista training courses, supporting over 25 clients who are rough sleepers or have experienced chronic homelessness. On completion of their training, MA has employed three individuals to work in the Café One van.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

In Cairns, like much of Australia, trauma is significant for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homeless population because of intergenerational trauma and family violence stemming from colonisation. In their recent evaluation of Douglas House Carrington and Mensinga¹ outline the following principles as key to a trauma-informed approach: recognising trauma; resisting



Photo provided by Mission Australia



Photo provided by Mission Australia

re-traumatisation; understanding cultural, historical and gender context; trustworthiness and transparency; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment; choice and control; safety; survivor partnerships; and pathways to trauma specific care. The trauma informed approach taken by Douglas House includes a focus on:

- Strengths is an individual approach as well as a key component of the trauma-informed approach. A strengths approach can be used to support a trauma-informed approach by reframing trauma to enable feelings of resilience and confidence to emerge. This approach offers physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both workers and clients and creates opportunities for people to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.²
- Recovery originated in the field of psychiatry and mental health but is now often included in multidisciplinary settings. Recovery is used to understand and respond to intersecting complexities of mental health, substance abuse, experience of care, and contact with the criminal justice system, which present in

the lives of those experiencing homelessness. Commonly, key aspects of recovery include: the promotion of citizenship; the organisational commitment; supporting personally defined recovery; and productive working relationships.³ For our recovery model to work, it was imperative that staff display a belief that recovery is possible.

Culturally Responsive

The local Cairns context necessitates that cultural factors and responses be incorporated in responses to homelessness in this region. Best practice approaches include: a focus on cultural safety; developing partnerships; including Aboriginal governance; ensuring equitable funding; employing Aboriginal staff; facilitating cultural reconnection; and engagement in research/evaluation on best practices.⁴

Why Our Approach Works

In Cairns, MA is committed to a holistic, trauma-informed approach aimed at ensuring the people we assist not only find a home, but also build a life that will allow them to keep it. While trauma informed care is not a new concept, we believe the way we are applying it here at *Going*

Places, Douglas House, Woree and through our Cafe One social enterprise is both important and necessary. We recognise that no two cases are the same — so you cannot treat people with one simple system or method. That is why we believe these programs are working so well; we are constantly connecting and collaborating with any service or individual that can help to improve the lives of the people we work with. We examine each case individually to ensure we make a difference.

The success of these integrated programs is a great example of what can be achieved to address chronic homelessness — particularly among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. There is no reason that our approach, programs and the lessons we have learned can't be rolled out in other parts of the country.

Endnotes

1. Carrington A and Mensinga J 2017, *Douglas House, Supported Housing Services, practice model development and evaluation*, March 2017, James Cook University, Townsville and Cairns.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*
4. *ibid.*

Homelessness in Rural and Regional Queensland Mining Communities

Shane Warren, PhD Student, School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith Health, Griffith University,
Dr Donna McDonald, Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Griffith University and
Professor Donna McAuliffe, School of Human Services and Social Work, Griffith Health, Griffith University*

The last 20 years has seen many Queensland rural and regional communities influenced by the mining cycle experience the dizzying economic heights associated with the boom and spectacular lows associated with the downturn. The decade long mining boom from 2002 to 2012 undoubtedly transformed mining communities across Queensland with rapid increases in community population and widening social and economic inequalities. The downturn from 2012 to the time of publication also impacted the prosperity of these communities with mining communities experiencing major job losses and general economic and community uncertainty. This article explores the impact of the mining cycle on regional and rural mining communities that support the coal mining industry, arguing that the mining cycle has been a major contributor to homelessness in these communities.

Despite the best efforts of some researchers, homelessness outside of Australia's capital cities continues to not be well understood at a policy, research or practice level. Surprisingly given the length of the last mining boom, regional and rural mining communities have not been the focus of much homelessness research at all. For many Australians the links between the mining industry and homelessness are paradoxical. How could any form of social disadvantage like homelessness occur in these communities when the dominant narrative of mining has been one of wealth and opportunity?

This narrative has served to conceal many of the inequalities, disadvantage and social issues including homelessness experienced in regional and rural mining communities. It also had the effect of perpetuating the notion that homelessness in these communities is a form of 'hidden

homelessness'.¹ This article is based on doctoral research involving the mining communities of Mackay, Moranbah and Dysart from 2013 to 2017 that located homelessness in these communities within the context of the mining cycle.

In recent years there has been much effort to understand the structural drivers of homelessness in Australia, specifically the links between the conditions of the labour market and the housing markets and homelessness across different regions.² This research has provided useful analysis to understand the structural factors that influence homelessness in Australia's regions and why homelessness is more prevalent in some regions than others. Their research findings also challenged many assumptions about the supply of housing and other general stereotypes that homelessness is largely a metropolitan issue that influence the publics' understanding of what causes homelessness.³

Contextualising factors which place people at risk of homelessness such as individual risk factors or life experiences, and access to affordable housing, employment and support services, relative to the mining cycle, is critical to understanding the causes of homelessness in these communities and ultimately how to best end a person or family's experience of homelessness.

The mining cycle has had, and continues to have, a major influence on homelessness in rural and regional mining communities. The decade long mining boom 2002 to 2012 had a profound effect on the larger regional community of Mackay, and the smaller inland rural communities of Moranbah and Dysart within the Bowen Basin coal mining region in Central Queensland with huge increases in population and demand for services.^{4, 5}

The regional city of Mackay and the two inland rural mining communities of Moranbah and Dysart have a long history of strong informal and formal connections for industry, business, services, recreation and social activities. The infrastructure of mining communities such as roads, housing, health and education services were placed under great stress as result of the rapid population increase and the demand for services. Specifically the demand for housing and housing supply factors, and other industry related factors, saw housing prices inflate contributing to the lack of any affordable housing in mining communities.⁶ Private rental housing for many years during the boom was simply out of reach for anyone on a low income.

The boom also placed significant pressure on few human services including the small number of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) located in Mackay, Moranbah and Dysart. These services experienced significant increase in demand for support services, some of which are only one or two worker services. This challenged their capacity to provide support or any level of housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Service providers reported that during the boom the only viable solution for many homeless people was to leave the community in hope of finding housing and employment elsewhere in Queensland or to move interstate. This was viewed as a more viable option than persevering in a community with next to no likelihood of accessing housing or other services and support.

The loss of community culture and identity was identified as a consequence of the boom which had impacted homelessness in the

community. While rural communities have few funded services, historically they have had strong informal support networks and other forms of social capital to assist people need.⁷ The cultural changes within mining communities during the boom saw an erosion of this social capital and as a consequence, more challenging circumstances for people experiencing homelessness.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data for people experiencing homelessness between 2001 and 2011 showed fluctuating rates of homelessness in the Mackay and Isaac Regions (which includes the communities of Dysart and Moranbah) at different stages during this decade, including for much of the decade higher rates of homelessness than the national average.⁸ SHS gave voice to the ABS Census data in these regions when they spoke about the increasing numbers of people seeking assistance and the resulting pressures on their agencies that were at capacity, or over service capacity, for much of this time.

Despite its fundamental limitations, the 2016 Census data will reflect data collected more than three years after the mining industry downturn. While the downturn is noted for a general overall improvement in access to affordable housing in mining communities, other factors such as loss of employment and general economic uncertainty have also influenced homelessness in these communities.

While the acute pressures of the boom period on SHS may have subsided, service providers report homelessness in mining communities continues to be under recognised and that policy responses have been entirely inadequate. This was reflected in a quote from a SHS provider interviewed in this research who reflected that the mining industry and government for a long time maintained an attitude of 'pretending that homelessness doesn't exist in mining communities'. Attitudes such as this ensure homelessness remains hidden. This begs the question, what if anything has been learned from the recent decade long mining boom regarding homelessness in regional and rural mining communities and moreover, what can be done to prevent and reduce homelessness in these communities in future phases of the mining cycle?

The research found that people experienced homelessness in rural and regional mining communities for a variety of reasons, but were commonly associated with family breakdown and domestic and family violence, unemployment and no affordable housing options. These issues were compounded for people with high vulnerability to homelessness (that is, people who have experienced chronic homelessness throughout their lives, people who have exited prisons, people with mental health concerns, people with alcohol and drug issues), which served to have the effect of unnecessarily prolonging the person's experience of homelessness. The influence of the mining industry in these communities can be seen to accentuate many of the issues that people experience in their pathway to homelessness, but also impact on the prospects of obtaining housing and support services needed to end their experience of homelessness.

It is critical that mining related activities are recognised as having major social impacts on rural and regional mining communities. This research puts forward five policy recommendations to prevent and reduce homelessness in regional and rural mining communities in future phases of the mining cycle.

1. A mandate for mining companies to accept their Social License to Operate (SLO) and that this fundamentally means that mining companies take seriously their responsibility to undertake consultation and gain agreement from rural and regional communities about the impacts of their industry on the community and undertake planning and strategies aimed at preventing homelessness for community members.
2. The need for longer-term social planning and policy responses that recognise the impacts on mining communities of extended boom periods followed by periods of downturn. The supply of housing and accommodation needs to be central focus of these policy processes.
3. Improving access to affordable housing options for people experiencing homelessness and

on low incomes during periods of mining boom.

4. Greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention responses for all community members at risk of homelessness through different phases of the mining cycle. Prevention and early intervention strategies maybe different at the height of a mining boom as opposed to the mining downturn.
5. Some increased capacity for crisis accommodation responses during acute periods of mining boom.

While the attitude of mining bringing untold wealth to mining communities continues to influence the national psyche, the learnings from the social impact of the mining cycle on rural and regional communities from the last two decades of boom and downturn are urgently needed to inform immediate policy responses. Preventing and reducing homelessness must be central to any policy action taken by the mining industry and government in attempts to mitigate the worst effects of the mining cycle.

* NB: the views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not in any way represent the views of the Queensland Government and the Department of Housing and Public Works.

Endnotes

1. Milbourne P, Cloke P 2006, *International Perspectives on Rural Homelessness*. Routledge, London.
2. Wood G, Batterham D, Cigdem M and Mallet S 2015, *The structural drivers of homelessness in Australia 2001 to 2011 Final Report 2 of 2*, AHURI, Melbourne.
3. *ibid*, *Final Report 1 of 2*.
4. Queensland Government Statistician's Office *Bowen Basin Population Report* June 2014. Retrieved from www.ggso.qld.gov.au/products/reports/bowen-basin-pop-report-2014.
5. Petkova V, Locki, S, Rolfe, Ivanova G 2009, *Mining developments and social impacts on communities: Bowen Basin case studies*, *Rural Society*, vol.19, no.3, pp.211–288
6. Haslam-Mackenzie F, Phillips R, Rowley S, Brereton D and Birdsall-Jones C 2009, *Housing market dynamics in resource boom towns, Final Report, No. 135*, AHURI, Melbourne.
7. Bay U 2012, *Making a living in diverse rural and remote communities*, in Maidment J and Bay U 2012, *Social Work in Rural Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW.
8. Wood G, Batterham D, Cigdem M and Mallet S 2016, *Without a home fact file*, ABC, www.abc.net.au/interactives/homelessness/

Keeping Homelessness on the Agenda

Jessica Vidafar, Operations Manager, The Cairns Housing and Homelessness Network

The Cairns Housing and Homelessness Network (CHHN) is a collaboration of housing and homelessness services, women and youth services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and peak bodies who meet on a monthly basis and have as their goal to *Achieve Housing Justice for all people in Cairns*.

The network has been a long-established group and actively ensures that the issue of homelessness in the Cairns community is kept on the agenda. Whilst it is recognised that definitions of homelessness often lead to different statistical accounts of homelessness, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 people are homeless in Cairns. We also know that there is in excess of 1,600 people on the Department of Housing's Register of Need. Sadly, these figures are not declining — our efforts are not seeing a decline in the dire housing situation in far north Queensland.

In November 2016, a Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) project entitled *Enabling Local Communities* identified that given the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the homelessness statistics in the Cairns

area, that their pathways into homelessness often differ to the experiences of non-Indigenous people.

Overcrowding in the cultural context of kinship and links to traditional lands or family ties often means the experience of First Nations peoples is more complex. The term 'spiritual homelessness' is outlined in the report as an experience for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait individuals and families.¹

The CHHN has a 30-year history of advocacy and awareness raising in the community and the activities and events organised this year highlight the commitment of members and the strong cross sectoral relationships that are apparent in the region. In the past the involvement in events such as the Home for Good campaign and Registry week, Homelessness Week and programs lead by Queensland Shelter and QCOSS have highlighted the plight of vulnerable people in our community.

This year events such as Homelessness Week, Anti-Poverty Week and International Tenants' Day brought together services from across

the community to provide awareness, information, skills and capacity.

This year was the first celebration of International Tenants' Day in Cairns with over 40 tent stalls set up at Fogerty Park. It brought together tenants, businesses, support and advocacy services and community members with the aim of raising awareness of tenancy issues and support for people to obtain and maintain a successful tenancy.

We know that housing is a basic human right and we need innovative solutions to assist people in maintaining their tenancy. These support needs may include health and mental health, domestic violence, drug and alcohol concerns, relationship breakdown, housing affordability and availability, financial issues and legal matters. Looking at prevention and early intervention approaches to homelessness is the key to preventing the cycle of homelessness and ensuring housing sustainability.

Endnote

1. QCOSS 2016, *Enabling Local Communities 2016*, QCOSS, Brisbane.



International Tenants' Day — Cairns, 3 October 2017

How to Keep Your Place: Vulnerability of Older Indigenous Women to Homelessness in Far North Queensland

Frances Every, Homelessness Support Service Worker

'How I gonna keep him away? That one I grewed up since he was a baby, I have to have a place for my grandchildren to come, they're my family, I can't say no...'

— Indigenous grandmother, interviewed in North Queensland in 2017.

While research and policy focus has concentrated on chronic homelessness and rough sleeping over the last ten years¹ the other broad category concerns those who have housing but are at risk of losing it, also referred to as hidden homelessness.² In rural areas homelessness is hidden because people without stable housing tend to stay with family and friends. This often leads to overcrowding, breach of tenancy law and eviction.

Drawing on the author's experience working in the areas of early intervention homelessness prevention, this article highlights issues around hidden homelessness as experienced by older Indigenous women in a rural community in North Queensland. Women whose tenancies are threatened by overcrowding may be forced to choose between asking family members to leave or being evicted, and as the quote above suggests, this can be a tough choice. Assisting these women through early intervention and prevention using a holistic approach that considers Indigenous norms, cultural practices and wishes regarding their housing is vital in preventing homelessness.

Indigenous people are overrepresented in homelessness statistics, particularly in the 'severely overcrowded' category³ Women have additional factors increasing their vulnerability, namely domestic and family violence. In Indigenous society women also have greater responsibility for housing⁴ and are often primary lease holders.

Indigenous women have strong obligations to accommodate family and kin due to demand sharing and cultural obligation.⁵ Overcrowding in North Queensland is also associated with chronic homelessness for some groups, particularly young, single men and visitors from remote communities who stay with kin, creating long-term overcrowding.⁶ Overcrowding is also associated with poor health, domestic violence and antisocial behaviour, and is a key factor for risk of homelessness.⁷

The Cycle of Overcrowding, Homelessness and Vulnerability

In 2012 Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander women comprised almost 75 per cent of State managed (social housing) tenants in Queensland.⁸ In the rural community observed, many tenancies of Indigenous women are at risk. Often these women are over 50, care for children of family members, share housing with extended family, have chronic health problems and are affected by domestic violence.

A reason for concentration of this group in social housing is they meet the 'high or very needs' criteria required. It is often erroneously assumed, (for example, by government housing officers,) that women are able to manage the presence and behaviour of visitors. Such assumptions may lead to eviction when appropriate supports are not made available.



Grandmother caring for the children of her extended family

The stories of 'Doreen' and 'Gertie' illustrate this:

Doreen

Doreen is 57, has custody of her granddaughter and shares a social housing property with her daughter. She also has informal care of her young nieces (their father is in jail and their mother drinks heavily). Doreen's extended family and the neighbours use her back yard for drinking sessions. These often involve family violence and property damage resulting in tenancy breaches. Doreen has a chronic health condition and sometimes misses Centrelink appointments, so payments are suspended and rent not paid. She now faces eviction, has a large damages debt and a poor tenancy history, factors that may exclude her from future social housing.

Gertie

Gertie is a grandmother in her 60s. Her two teenaged grandchildren have lived with her for most of their lives. Her grandson has a drinking problem and has smashed many windows over the years. Extended family frequented the property and used the small back yard for noisy

drinking parties. This led to Gertie's eviction. She is now staying at her son's place which is a gathering place for visiting family from remote communities and where drinking parties are also ongoing. Gertie is distressed and cannot rest, she was too frail to clean her property so has a cleaning debt in addition to the damages repairs. Her furniture and white goods are ruined from being stored outside and her pension is taken by her family.

The figure below depicts the cycle of overcrowding and homelessness. Debt, political exclusion, domestic violence, elder abuse, involvement in child protection systems and poor health are also important factors in this cycle. For Doreen and the children in her care, eviction will perpetuate the cycle of overcrowding, vulnerability to ill-health and exposure to violence; Gertie is now exposed to elder abuse, has lost her household goods and her physical and emotional wellbeing are suffering.

The promotion of exploitative financial and product rental services is common in Indigenous communities, as is poor financial literacy and there is a dearth of advocacy services.

As a result, household incomes are eroded by multiple debts (that is, for damages, cleaning, rent arrears and loans). If domestic violence or elder abuse is occurring, women have even less control over their money. Combined Centrelink incomes of household members may seem high but are not always an accurate indication of financial capacity without consideration of the above. This can mean that root causes of financial hardship that impact on women's tenancies are not understood and appropriate support and intervention is not offered.

Social housing is often the last resort and people who are evicted are likely to fall into chronic homelessness.¹⁰ Older Indigenous women have a key role as carers and providers of much needed stability for children so secure, affordable housing is essential to family wellbeing. The intention of social housing is to target the most vulnerable, that is, households with high and complex needs.¹¹ This goal is lost when the people who are most in need of social housing, are excluded from it.

Barriers to Accessing Services

Reluctance to seek assistance also contributes to the risk of homelessness for Indigenous women. Cultural differences also play a role as Indigenous and female specific services are rare in the area.¹² There are also avoidance behaviours due to low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. The power imbalance between human service workers and tenants are also part of the barriers experienced by Indigenous women.¹³

Indigenous women often do not present to services until eviction is imminent or unless mandated by housing or child protection authorities. This may be too late for intervention and gives rise to pejorative assumptions that women do not want help or are too lazy or disorganised to maintain their housing.

The reality is that Indigenous women, particularly if domestic and family violence is a factor in their lives are often deeply estranged

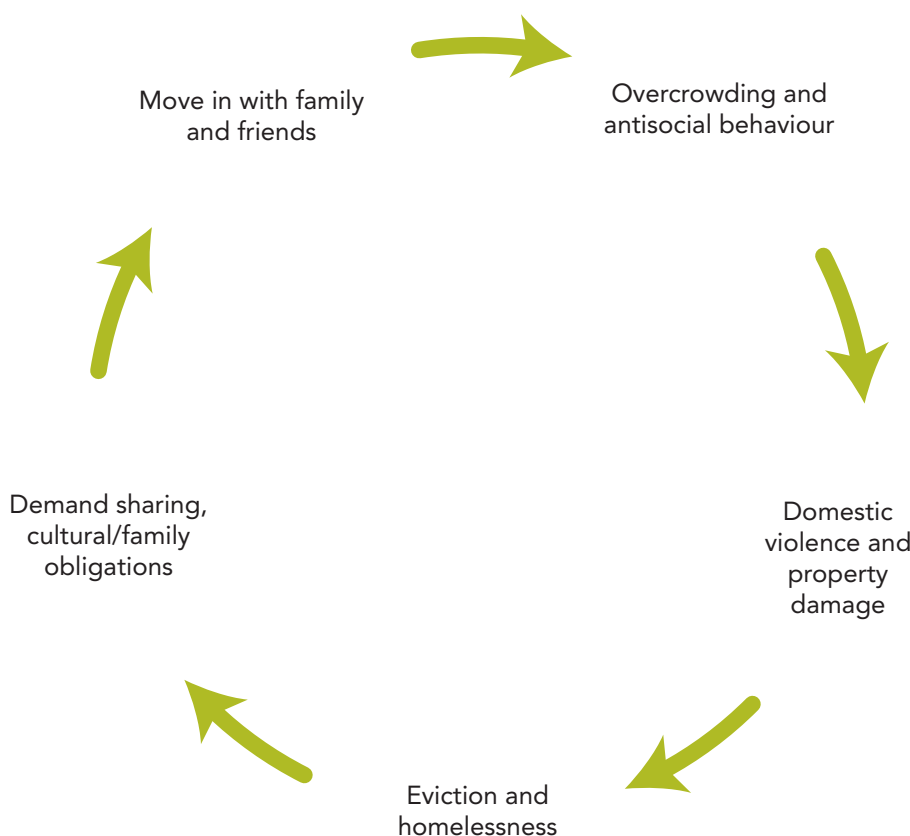


Figure 1. The cycle of overcrowding, homelessness and vulnerability ⁹

from the broader community. They may also be unaware of the help available to them or too unwell physically and mentally to seek it. Pressure from authorities, and a fear and perception of the inevitability of eviction also engender a sense of hopelessness and that there is 'nothing else to lose'.

Feelings of frustration, hopelessness, anger and powerlessness are often expressed by Indigenous women in the community. These feelings are conveyed clearly by the following conversation extracts:

Trying to keep your place...

Means paying for holes in walls, broken windows and doors, because of domestic violence...

Having the housing mob talk down to you, use big words, cause you shame and confusion, send letters you can't understand.....

Keeping the mob away, family coming for sorry business because so many Aboriginal people die from suicide or sickness — the mob don't know how to grieve without getting drunk anymore....

Keeping your money for rent and bills ... but what if your family takes it, takes your key card? You have to pay for funerals, Rent To Buy, Crisco... you want to have good things for your kids just like other people...

Losing your place...

Means sleeping on someone's couch, waiting for the next drinking session and hoping you can escape the violence and noise and blame from police, having your stuff stolen and broken....

Means more danger from DV and sexual abuse, you can't keep yourself and the kids safe when you're not in your own place, you can't lock the door....

Means losing hope... drinking all day because there's nothing else...

— Indigenous women, interviewed 2017, North Queensland.

Conclusion

The housing circumstances of older Indigenous women are often precarious. Homelessness increases exposure to multiple risks for women and their families. Factors such as domestic violence, property damage and anti-social behaviour can be both the cause and the result of homelessness and are cyclical in nature (as illustrated in Figure 1). This situation is also cost-inefficient for government as homelessness increases pressure on human service agencies.¹⁴

Limited resources (staff and housing stock) poor understanding of cultural and local influences and inappropriate policy (for example the 'Three Strikes Policy' abandoned in 2015¹⁵) also determine state housing services responses to tenancy problems.

Prevention and early intervention are important in preventing homelessness.¹⁶ These supports are best offered by homelessness services which are embedded in the local community and ideally, are well engaged with local Indigenous people. To work effectively, both state housing providers and homelessness services would have the following qualities:

- early intervention focus — engage at first indicator of risk
- prevention — engaging with the community at relevant levels via different mediums such as education, to facilitate broader change
- flexibility — the ability to work with not only the individual tenant but also all relevant people associated with the risk.
- duration of need — not time limited
- expertise — staff who are well trained in homelessness, tenancy related issues and cultural understanding.

As highlighted in this article, overcrowding by extended family and attendant tenancy threats are major causes of eviction. A culturally appropriate, flexible and collaborative approach is critical in ending the cycle of vulnerability and homelessness. The vital role of older women as caregiver, and the strength of their connection to home and family should be acknowledged and honoured in the delivery of services and in the formulating of effective and compassionate approaches to homelessness prevention.

Endnotes

1. Black C and Gronda H 2011, *Evidence for improving access to homelessness services*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.
2. Memmott P and Chambers C 2010, Indigenous Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction, *Parity*, vol.23, no.9, pp. 8–11.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014, *Information Paper, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Perspective on Homelessness* (no 4736.0).
4. Birdsall-Jones C, Corunna V, Turner N 2010, *Indigenous homelessness*, AHURI Final Report No. 143, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.
5. Phillips R and Parsons T 2011, *Homelessness in Mareeba: the nature of the problem and what can be done about it*, Final report for Mareeba Homelessness Reference Group, Rhonda Phillips Consulting.
6. ibid.
7. Pholeros P 2010, Will the crowding be over or will there still be overcrowding in Indigenous housing? Lessons from the Housing for Health Projects 1985–2010, *Healthhabitat, The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, No. 27, Summer 2010: pp.8–18, ABS 2014 op cit.
8. Wesley Mission Queensland 2015, *Doing it Tough: Queensland Older Women's Experience of Poverty*. <https://www.wmq.org.au/...urbis-doing-it-tough.../2015-urbis-doing-it-tough>, p 8.
9. Adapted from Phillips and Parsons 2011, op cit.
10. Australian Government 2008, *The Road Home: a National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, the Homelessness White Paper, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra.
11. Queensland Government 2016, *Working together for better housing and sustainable communities: Discussion Paper*, www.hpw.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/HousingDiscussionPaper.pdf
12. Graham D, Wallace V, Selway D, Howe T, Kelly T 2014, Why are so many Indigenous women Homeless in Far North West Queensland Australia? : A service providers' Views of Causes, *Journal of Tropical Psychology*, vol.4, no.9, pp.1–11.
13. McDonald C, Craik C, Hawkins L, Williams J 2011, *Professional Practice in Human Service Organisations*, Allen and Unwin, NSW.
14. Australian Government 2008, op cit.
15. *Courier Mail* 04/12/2015, Three-strikes rule for public housing tenants ditched for new 'fair expectations of behaviour' policy, <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/queensland-government/threestrikes-rule-for-public-housing-tenants-ditched-for-new-fair-expectations-of-behaviour-policy/news-story/aca990d1f33b9271be9f9d5ba4ca59a7>
16. Australian Government 2008, op cit.

My Money Program: Supporting Pathways to Financial and Housing Stability

Sharon Edwards, Financial Inclusion Program Manager, Shelter Housing Action Cairns

'...When your life is in crisis, you are only just surviving not living.'

As we know, causes of homelessness and barriers to housing are rarely about one single issue. Similarly, when we consider some of the causes of poverty, financial exclusion and financial hardship in our community, it is often extremely complex. What we do know is that families presenting to Shelter Housing Action Cairns (SHAC) as homeless or at risk of losing their home, are also identifying extreme financial hardship and conversely, those identifying financial hardship are more often than not experiencing housing stress.

There are increasing and competing demands on how all of us use our often limited income to meet the rising costs of living. At Shelter Housing Action Cairns (SHAC) we see the exclusion of low-income earners from safe affordable financial products (namely credit). We witness their displacement from social and financial safety nets, coupled with the long-term impacts of financial abuse and predatory fringe finance. Combined with a shortage of affordable housing, this works to create a perilous and precarious housing and financial situation.

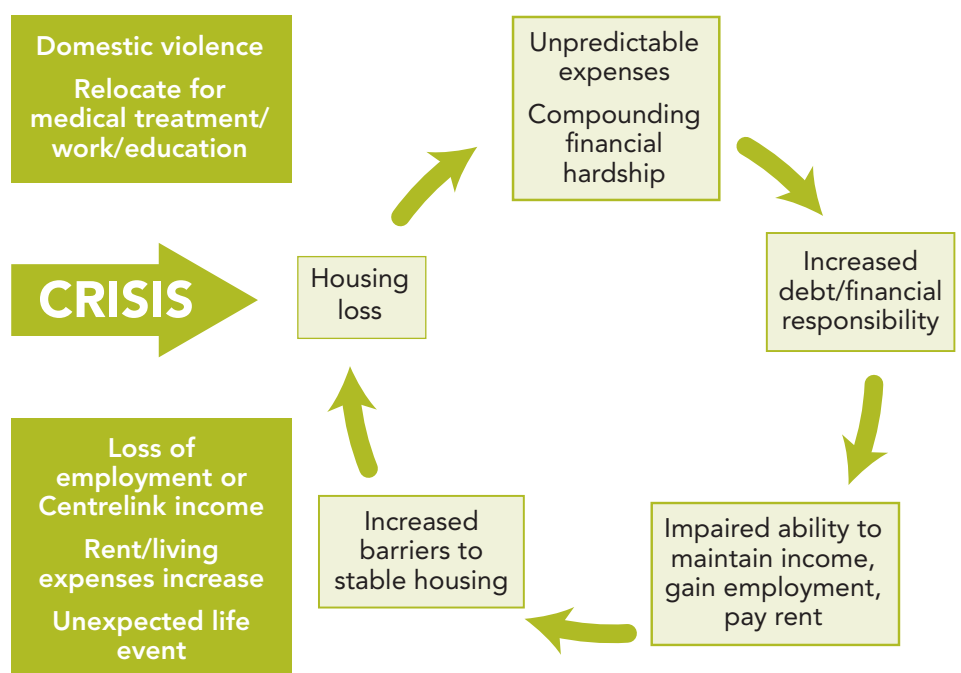
Access to knowledge, tools and the services that can support us to make ends meet on a day to day basis, avoid financial pitfalls, reduce levels of debt and plan for the future (including the 'unexpected'), are critical in maintaining housing security. To ignore the underlying financial hardship is to risk families and individuals recycling back into homelessness and through our door.

Over the last decade in response to this SHAC has developed a number of financial inclusion tools, strategies and programs aimed at alleviating the financial hardship experienced by homeless families and vulnerable low-income earners in Cairns and in the broader Far North Queensland community.

This 'bridging' of homelessness and financial inclusion work through the provision of intensive financial case management and microfinance sits alongside our crisis housing and support program. This work has proven to be a very successful model for addressing both the financial needs underpinning those presenting as homeless or vulnerably housed and the housing issues of those requesting financial support. Central to this model is the My Money Program.

The My Money Program was initially and successfully piloted with the support of philanthropic funding to assist families living in SHAC crisis accommodation. Subsequently the program extended as a pilot and co-designed with the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works to provide assistance to those living in crisis accommodation, the private rental market as well as those in transitional housing in the Cairns region.

In recognition of the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are homeless and/or at risk of homelessness locally, as well as women escaping domestic and family violence, the My Money Program targets the users our service (although not exclusively) in order to assist these people in need.



The Poverty and Homelessness Trap



Image from the cover of *Parity* volume 23, issue 6 — Responding to Homelessness in Queensland

Image provided by the 139 Club

The following is a composite client produced from responses from participants of the My Money Program when first making contact with the program.

I am a single, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mum (80 per cent) and I do not like where my life is going at the moment. (68 per cent)

In the past year I have moved home between two and five times (89 per cent) and I rely on fringe and payday lenders to manage my budget. (74 per cent)

I have three children who have poor or very poor attendance at school. (52 per cent)

I am not confident I can afford a home (64 per cent) and I need emergency relief vouchers to live. (63 per cent)

I do not have a good relationship with money (64 per cent) and never have spare money to spend how I would like. (79 per cent)

I don't like planning for the future. (63 per cent)¹

The My Money Model of Support seeks to:

- improve the ability of families and individuals to clearly identify and articulate their current financial situation (*Acknowledge financial situation*)
- maximise income entitlements and earnings through engagement with Centrelink, Child Support, Education and Training, and Job Providers (*Improve financial position*)
- explore methods and capacity for a family to reduce personal debt and expenses (*Increase control of personal finances*)
- increase knowledge and capacity to effectively manage their personal income (*Increase financial literacy and control*)
- increased knowledge of consumer rights and financial support services (*Increase financial literacy*)
- increase access to affordable, long-term sustainable housing (*Increase access to secure and stable housing*)
- Identify strategies to reduce vulnerability to future financial crisis (*Increase control of personal finances*).

However, this work is not undertaken in isolation. SHAC forms part of a much greater and broader human services sector with whom we collaborate to overcome barriers to housing — namely, housing and housing support providers as well as financial support services that work across the continuum of support.

The My Money Program at Work

Case Study: Mary*

Mary is an Indigenous mother of five and having left a violent relationship was renting a home privately. She struggled to pay the rent as well as fulfil her family obligations following the passing of a family member. As a result, she and her children were given a Notice to Leave due to rent arrears. Mary found accommodation through SHAC's Crisis Accommodation Program and began receiving support via the My Money Program.

Mary spoke of not feeling confident in managing her finances and feeling the pressure to support other family members who were also struggling to put a roof over

their head and feed their families. She struggled to say no to high-pressure door-to-door, telephone and shopping centre salespeople and felt sick when looking at her bank accounts and all her deductions. Mary was also overwhelmed at the prospect of making any changes.

A Financial Health Check revealed the following:

- excessive bank fees, largely linked to the mistiming of direct debits that resulted in her account being overdrawn each week
- rental arrears and maintenance debt of \$5,287.30
- Ergon Energy debt of \$1,581.55 with deductions of \$200.00 per fortnight
- pay-day lender deductions of \$322.65 per fortnight
- rental contract deductions of \$317.75 per fortnight
- photo company contract for \$4,990.00 with deductions of \$51.41 per fortnight
- Private Health Insurance deductions of \$56.32 per fortnight
- Foxtel contract with deductions of \$134 per month
- charity contract donations of \$72.00 per month
- fines.
- Disposable Income estimation
 - Total Income (\$2,017.80 p/f)
 - Deductions (\$1,585.13)
 - = \$432.67 per fortnight. This equated to \$5.15 per person per day for essential household expenses.
- Engagement in intensive outreach support from the MMP over a five month period resulted in the following outcomes for Mary:
 - support to respond to immediate need for food for her family
 - advocacy in lowering private rental debt to \$4,180.80
 - negotiated agreement with real estate agents for repayments of \$50 per week keeping client from being TICA listed
 - opened new concession bank account that prevents client from being able to over-draw on account

- support to set up correctly timed deductions to successfully pay off pay-day lender contracts increasing disposable income by \$322.65 per fortnight within one month of tenancy with Crisis Accommodation Property accommodation.
- assistance to set up fine repayments of \$80.00 per fortnight preventing her driver's license from being suspended.
- advocacy to cancel payments being made to a Photo Company and the return of \$500 to Mary
- advocacy to lower repayments of rental contracts to \$211.85 per fortnight
- advocacy to cancel contracted deductions for private health insurance, Foxtel and charity donations increasing disposable income by \$159.32 per fortnight
- Support to access a No interest Loan to purchase a lawnmower at \$30 per fortnight (reducing costs associated with paying someone to do it and increasing ability to maintain new property).
- Disposable income estimation
 - Total Income (\$2,025.00 p/f)
 - Deductions (\$1,055.85)
 - = \$969.15 per fortnight. This equates to \$11.53 per person per day for essential household expenses.

Key Outcomes: Outcomes as a result of the interface between housing and financial support

'I told them to get stuffed! I told the lady that I had been ripped off by your kind of companies before and I don't want anything from you. Then I just straight up walked away. It felt good!'

— Mary, who subsequently encountered a salesperson for a photo company when she was walking through a shopping centre.

- Housing Outcome
 - Successfully transitioned from Crisis Accommodation Property into long-term Department of Housing property
- Maximised Disposable Income and Housing Affordability

- Disposable income increased from \$432.67 per fortnight to \$969.15 per fortnight.

- Reduced Debt
 - Cancellation of photo contract (estimated \$4,400.00 saving)
 - Cancellation of pay TV contract (waived debt of \$660.00)
 - Fixed private rental debt assessment (waived debt \$1,065.50)
 - Budgeting and repayments cleared Ergon debt of \$1,581.55 in time for transition to new home
- Increased Financial Capabilities
 - Mary described feeling more confident and in control around budgeting, managing money and choosing safe financial options.

The My Money Program does more than just assist people to juggle their money. Gaining control over finances in order to support stability with housing can mean so much more for those we work with. Participants spoke of being better able to meet their own and their family's basic needs. They told of the improved attendance and engagement of their children at school and an overwhelming improvement in their general wellbeing.

'The kids are happier — there is now a variety of food in the fridge.'

'For the first time in my life I have some left over money and I can take the kids places.'

'Before I didn't even care about my own health ... my diabetes, now I buy tablets and see the doctor.'

'Now I am at peace — before something was tearing me.. my heart was sore.. Now I don't have to worry — I am safe.'

* Not her real name.

Endnote

1. *Getting Off the Crisis-Go-Round*. My Money Program Summary Report. A comprehensive analysis of the value created when financial literacy support is provided with crisis housing. Think Impact — Jan 2016.

Dignity First

Jessica Vidafar, Operations Manager, Access Community Housing

The Queensland Government established the Dignity First Fund to deliver innovative responses to help people experiencing homelessness live with dignity. Access Community Housing Company (ACHC) was one of the recipients of the Dignity First Fund. We received \$67,980 to provide 350 dignity bags to people experiencing homelessness in the Cairns region. The project is aimed to provide the basic necessities to disadvantaged and vulnerable people across our community.

We are working with key homeless, health and community services to deliver the bags across Cairns. By providing people with essential items such as toiletries and basic hygiene products, we hope to boost peoples' health and wellbeing. The project has already been successful in helping many people connect with services and programs around health, wellbeing, housing, support and specialised services. We also have mobile phones available for people escaping domestic violence to allow them the opportunity to connect with family, friends and services safely.

The aim of our project is to improve connectedness across different sectors and help prevent long-term homelessness. The bag provides people with the tools to connect and to, make contact with, relevant specialised services, from homeless

services for information and advice, health services, food bank vouchers, free meals, free haircuts, vouchers for linen and clothing items. We hope to contribute to developing sustainable pathways out of homelessness by involving a sector wide response across the homelessness and health sectors, and building partners within the community and business sector.

We want to provide people with the means and access to specialised services at their time of need. We employed a Pathways Officer to help us distribute these bags to services, connect in regularly with them and provide updates.

Homelessness affects people and communities across Australia. The housing and homelessness sectors come together in Cairns to help address the issue of homelessness and to improve pathways to housing. We remain firmly committed to the aim of reducing homelessness and assisting people to sustain successful tenancies. We acknowledge that all community members including young people, seniors, students, families and refugees can find themselves at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This can often last days, weeks, months or years and often has a big impact on a person's mental and physical health.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics released a revised definition of homelessness in 2012 to include a lack of one or more elements that represent a 'home'. These elements included, but were not limited, to a sense of security, privacy, safety and stability.

We would all agree that safe, affordable and secure housing with access to supports contributes to improving health and wellbeing



Jessica Vidafar (Operations Manager) and
Michael Dalla Vecchia (Pathways Officer)

outcomes. We recognise the importance of an early intervention approach to homelessness and we continue to look for initiatives that will continue to build and strengthen community reliance and awareness. We want to ensure that young people, seniors and families are able to access supports and interventions at their time of need. We want to create sustainable pathways out of homelessness by providing people with the tools and means to connect with services.

It has been great to receive support from many businesses and support services to stock our bags with basic items, such as Nick Loukas from Alive Pharmacy who donated hygiene items and sold others to us at cost price. However, to keep our project going we need further community support.

We are delighted to be a part of the local Piccones Community Benefit Program and recently we were approved to be a part of the Grill'd Local Matters program. We have also recently started a funding campaign to support our initiative through GoFundMe Campaign gofundme.com/dignity-bags-for-the-homeless.



Chapter 4: Key Issues and Themes in the Response to Homelessness in Queensland

A: Housing and Housing Issues in Queensland

The Brisbane Housing Story

Jon Eastgate, 99 Consulting

Both the City of Brisbane and the wider South-East Queensland region have experienced steady population growth over a number of decades. Between 2003 and 2013 the population of Brisbane City grew from just over 930,000 to 1,130,000,¹ and it could reach of 1.5 million by 2041. Across South-East Queensland the population grew from 2.6 million to 3.3 million between 2003 and 2013, and could reach over five million by 2041.²

Accommodating this increase will require the provision of more than 900,000 extra dwellings between

2011 and 2041, including over 175,000 in Brisbane City.³

Despite efforts at urban consolidation, much of this growth continues to be accommodated through low density suburban development on the outskirts of the city. This has led to an expanding urban footprint and challenges relating to the provision of transport and other infrastructure over a wide, sparsely settled urban area. It has also created increased cost pressures on housing throughout the area and especially in the inner and middle areas of Brisbane City with their

access to transport, services and employment.

Like all Australian cities, Brisbane has experienced declining housing affordability in recent decades. While this problem is not as extreme as those experienced in Sydney and Melbourne, Brisbane saw the ratio between house prices* and incomes climb from 3.8 in 2001 to over six in 2008–2010, although it has since dropped slightly to sit at 5.7 in 2016.⁴

The impact of this has been a decline in home ownership, with the proportion of households in the



Greater Brisbane area owning their own home outright falling from 35 per cent to 26 per cent between 2001 and 2011, while the proportion paying a mortgage rose from 30 per cent to 36 per cent.⁵

This pressure also affects Brisbane's rental market. Both the rise in house prices and the competition from higher income households delaying home ownership have pushed rents upwards. This increased rental cost affects all households, but particularly those on lower incomes.

Impact on Low Income Households

While lack of affordability affects all households to some degree, it particularly affects those on the lowest incomes. In 2016, more than half of the low income tenants in the Brisbane local government area were paying more than 30 per cent of their income in rent⁶ — a widely accepted measure of “housing stress” — and over 77 per cent of low income home purchasers with a mortgage are paying over 30 per cent of their income in loan repayments.⁷

A recent survey by Anglicare Australia⁸ highlighted the impact of this lack of affordability on those on the lowest

incomes. They examined all the vacant rental property listings in a single weekend in April 2017 — 8,423 listings in all. Of these, only 99 properties were suitable and affordable for households dependent on Centrelink (income support) payments, while 1,157 properties were available and suitable for households on a minimum wage. This, of course, does not guarantee that the affordable housing will go to low income households, since they are likely to be competing for rentals with households on more secure incomes who will be seen as a better risk.

Alongside this affordability issue is the fact that private rental housing in Queensland is relatively insecure. Tenants are typically signed up to leases of between six and 12 months, and can be asked to vacate their property with two months' notice. This means that lower income tenants may face periodic risk of becoming homeless as they are forced to find new housing at short notice in a very constrained market.

This level of sustained pressure on the home ownership and private rental markets filters down into the social housing sector. There are approximately 34,000 social housing

dwellings in Greater Brisbane and over 7,500 people on the waiting list for this housing, two thirds of whom are in Very High or High Need categories.⁹ These high and very high need households can wait for up to a year to be housed, and in this time are generally homeless or in insecure and unaffordable housing. This waiting list data almost certainly underestimates the latent demand for social housing in the city. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling identified that in 2011 16.6 per cent of persons in Greater Brisbane were at the highest level of risk of homelessness — over half a million people.¹⁰

The rate of change and growth in Brisbane has had particular impact on in the inner and middle suburban areas of the city. Growth on the fringes has led to steep rises in land values in the areas closest to the city centre. This has meant that areas that formerly provided a large stock of affordable (if often run-down) rental housing are now prime real estate locations, subject either to renovation by wealthy buyers or redevelopment for more intense and higher-value forms of housing. In the process, lower income residents have been under increasing pressure. This affordable housing, and particularly the stock of boarding houses and cheap flats that made up much of the older inner city housing, have not been replaced in more affordable outer areas, which have mostly been developed with low density detached housing. This has led to particular issues for low income singles, and the response has tended to involve sharing and the development of an informal and quasi-boarding house market using detached dwellings originally designed for families.

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the persistence of homelessness in Brisbane. The 2011 census counted over 4,000 people homeless in the Brisbane City area on a single night, including people sleeping rough, in crisis housing, staying with friends and relatives or in other forms of temporary or insecure accommodation.¹¹ This number is likely to represent an underestimate of the total number who experience homelessness over the course of any year, since people cycle in and out of homelessness over time.



Brisbane street art

Policy Responses

There have been a range of policy responses to this situation, discussed briefly below.

Planning Policy

At the macro level, State and local governments have responded to the pressure in the housing market through a series of plans. The latest of these, the draft South East Queensland Regional Plan, was released in late 2016. It attempts to guide the delivery of housing, employment and infrastructure for an expected two million extra people by 2041.¹² This plan is the latest in a series of regional plans stretching back to the early 1990s.

While these plans have had some success in guiding land development and infrastructure provision over the past 25 years, they have rarely incorporated any meaningful strategies to address housing affordability, largely taking the implicit approach that increased supply will keep prices down. This approach can yield perverse results. For instance, in the inner and middle areas of Brisbane the drive for greater intensification has tended to lead to less, not more, affordable housing as older properties are replaced by new, more up-market apartments or larger high-value homes. Recent publicity has focused around a potential unit 'glut' in Brisbane's inner and middle suburbs as a result of a large number of units coming onto the market at the same time.

However, while this may have some effect on easing prices it will not come anywhere close to matching the affordability of the housing these units have replaced. At the same time, the relatively low density development of outer areas has led to a large stock of detached housing aimed primarily at the home purchase market, leading to a more disjointed rental market across the region.

Inclusionary zoning, whereby developers are required to include a set proportion of affordable housing in their residential development plans, has frequently been discussed as a planning mechanism to generate extra affordable housing in new or redeveloped areas. In the early 2000s both the Queensland Department of Housing and Brisbane City Council discussed the use of this mechanism in

areas where planning changes were creating significant housing value uplift. However, although this mechanism is used in other Australian states and overseas, successive Queensland governments have been unwilling to legislate for its operation in Queensland. Hence, if housing provided through the market is not affordable, the only option available to governments is to subsidise it directly.

Social Housing

The loss of affordable private rental and the increasing pressure on low income renters has had a huge impact on the social housing system. Across Australia, social housing is a relatively small part of the housing mix, making up approximately four per cent of all housing.¹³

Brisbane is fairly similar proportion, with approximately 4.6 per cent of occupied dwellings in Brisbane operated by the State housing authority or funded community housing providers.¹⁴

Provision of social housing is primarily a State Government responsibility, but since the Second World War its funding has primarily been driven by the Commonwealth through a series of agreements with the States, the most recent of which is the National Affordable Housing Agreement. From the 1980s onward, real spending on social housing has fallen steadily across Australia, including in Queensland, and the already small supply of social housing has been gradually shrinking as the portfolio ages and requires replacement. Within this period there have been occasional surges of extra funding into social housing. The most recent of these was the Social Housing Initiative which was instituted as part of fiscal stimulus measures in the wake of the Global Financial Crisis. This program constructed over 17,000 new social and affordable housing dwellings across Australia, including 3,600 in Queensland, between 2008 and 2012.¹⁵ However, there is no substantial commitment to ongoing growth.

Social housing is rented to low income households, with rent calculated as a proportion of their income and the shortfall between this rent and the full cost of provision absorbed by the housing authority.

The late 1990s and early 2000s saw a significant set of reforms in Queensland's social housing system to cope with increased demand in the face of limited new supply. Key elements included:

- A shift from a 'wait-turn' allocation system where tenancies were allocated based on date of application, to a needs based system where houses are allocated to those with the most pressing and serious housing and support needs.
- Alongside this reform, a stronger operational focus on diverting applicants who are not 'high need' away from applying for social housing and into programs that support them to access private rental housing, and a growth in programs that support this aim.
- A change from a 'tenure for life' approach to a 'duration of need' approach in which tenant's eligibility is regularly reviewed and those whose circumstances have improved are encouraged or required to return to the private market.
- A gradual shift from a single State Government provider to a multi-provider system with non-profit housing providers operating at significant scale, albeit mostly with government funding and close regulatory supervision. These diverse organisations operate within a unified system in which there is a single rent policy and a single eligibility, wait-list and allocation system.¹⁶

These reforms have been largely successful in re-orienting the system from a generalist housing option to a targeted 'welfare' model meeting the needs of the most highly disadvantaged households. However, there have been two less desirable consequences of the change. The first is that the shift to higher need households exacerbated the financial problems in the social housing system, reducing rental income while increasing the cost of management. This has led to growing concerns over the financial viability of social housing.

The second issue is that there is an increasing cohort of households who are not in the highest need categories but struggle to afford housing in the private market. These now require a different policy response.

'Affordable Housing'

One response to the needs of this 'missing middle' has been the creation of what has come to be termed 'affordable housing' or 'affordable rental housing'. This is housing specifically provided to fill the gap left by the loss of affordable private rental properties and the increasing residualisation of social housing. Affordable housing is typically provided through a mix of government and private funding, let to low income tenants who may have access to more income or resources than the base Centrelink support (for instance, low-wage or part-time workers) and rented at a discount on the market rates.

At the start of the 2000s, the Queensland Government and Brisbane City Council collaborated in creating the Brisbane Housing Company Limited (BHCL) as a vehicle for this form of housing provision. BHCL is an independent company with a mix of government and community shareholders, funded primarily through State Government with a contribution from Brisbane City Council and leveraged private sector borrowings. It was originally conceived as a way of responding to the loss of affordable rental housing in the inner city, filling the gap left by gentrification and urban redevelopment. Since it started operation in 2002 it has gradually built up its housing stock so that it now manages in excess of 1,500 affordable rental dwellings.¹⁷

Between 2008 and 2013, the stock of affordable housing was further boosted by a Commonwealth Government program known as the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). This program was open to private or non-profit housing providers, and provides an annual subsidy over a period of ten years to developers who build housing and rent it at no more than 80 per cent of market value. This program delivered over 10,000 properties in Queensland, a substantial proportion of which are in the Greater Brisbane area. During this period, a proportion of the Social Housing Initiative mentioned in the previous section also went to affordable housing, further boosting this sector.

Since the discontinuation of this scheme in 2013 there have been few opportunities to expand affordable housing supply, but the 2017 Commonwealth Budget indicates that the creation of a National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation will channel investment into this sector.

New Models of Housing and Support

A final development worth noting is the recent adoption of a number of 'best practice' models of housing and support aimed at housing homeless and highly disadvantaged households. These include the following.

- The increasing adoption of 'housing first' approaches to supporting long-term homeless people with complex needs, and a move away from older style continuum models of homelessness service provision.
- The founding of Common Ground housing services in Australia, including a 146-unit complex in inner city Brisbane.
- The spread of Foyer housing, which aims to provide young people with secure housing and support to engage in education, training and employment as a way of breaking the cycle of disadvantage.
- The wider adoption of similar supportive housing approaches through the housing system.

These models reflect the ongoing persistence of homelessness and the recognition that it requires a holistic response rather than a stop-gap crisis service.

Looking to the Future

Housing affordability is currently a hot topic in Australian and Queensland politics, with declining affordability in key markets putting pressure on governments to come up with solutions. The recent Commonwealth budget included a range of measures to promote affordability, including a plan to help first home owners save for a home deposit through their superannuation, plans for a bond aggregator to channel funds into affordable rental housing and renegotiation of the National Affordable Housing Agreement. Although these represent significant acknowledgement of the issue, many

have argued that the reforms don't go far enough.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Queensland Government has been working on a comprehensive new housing strategy since early 2016. This is due to be released within weeks, but while there are many rumours it is not clear exactly what direction it will take. All we can say is, 'Watch this space!'

* This is the ratio between median house prices and median annual household income.

Endnotes

1. Department of Housing and Public Works, *Queensland Housing Profiles, Greater Brisbane Greater Capital City Statistical Area (GCCSA) Compared with Brisbane (C) Local Government Area (LGA)*, generated from <http://statistics.qgso.qld.gov.au/hpw/profiles> on 12 May 2017, p.6.
2. Queensland Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, *Shaping SEQ: Draft South East Queensland Regional Plan*, October 2016, p.30.
3. *ibid.*, p.12.
4. <http://blog.corelogic.com.au/2016/06/property-price-income-ratio-rising-sydney-melbourne-canberra-flat-falling-elsewhere/>
5. Department of Housing and Public Works, *op cit.*, p.10.
6. *ibid.*, p.20.
7. *ibid.*, p.21.
8. Anglicare Australia, *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, April 2017, pp38-44, downloaded from <http://www.anglicare.asn.au/research-reports/the-rental-affordability-snapshot/docs/default-source/default-document-library/rental-affordability-snapshot-2017>
9. Department of Housing and Public Works, *op cit.*, pp.12, 13.
10. Department of Housing and Public Works, *op cit.*, p.16
11. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2049.0 *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*, 2011, Table 4.
12. Queensland Department of Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning, *Shaping SEQ: Draft South East Queensland Regional Plan*, October 2016,
13. National Shelter, *Housing Australia Fact Sheet*, updated September 2014, p.14
14. Calculated from Department of Housing and Public Works, *op cit.*, pp.10, 13.
15. KPMG, *Housing Ministers' Advisory Committee: Social Housing Initiative Review*, September 2012, downloaded from: http://www.nwhn.net.au/admin/file/content101/c6/social_housing_initiative_review.pdf
16. Current policy settings can be viewed at <https://www.qld.gov.au/housing/public-community-housing/eligibility-applying-for-housing/>
17. <http://bhcl.com.au/about-bhcl/>
18. A summary of the measures can be found at <http://blogs.unsw.edu.au/cityfutures/blog/2017/05/budget-2017-charts-new-social-and-affordable-housing-agenda/>

Just Cause: A Just Outcome for Queensland Private Renters

Penny Carr, Chief Executive Officer, Tenants Queensland

Introduction

Recent Census data shows the number of Queensland households renting their home was higher than the number of households paying off a mortgage. With declining home ownership rates the under 55 year olds, Australia is becoming a nation of renters. Many young Australians are destined to rent for life and approximately half of the renting households in Australia have done so continuously for ten years or more.

With growing numbers of renters, and an increasing reliance on the private rental market as a long-term tenure, a serious overhaul of tenancy laws in Queensland, indeed in all states and territories, is long overdue.

Background

The structure of Australian residential tenancy laws remain largely unchanged since the 1970s.

In 1975, Queensland was the first state to pass legislation concerned solely with residential tenancies. Previous regulation of rental relationships were found within laws pertaining to landlords and tenants of both commercial and residential tenancies, as well as within property and conveyancing statutes.

The *Landlord and Tenant Act 1948* provided relatively strong tenancy protections including both rent control and security of tenure. The *Termination of Tenancies Act 1970* abolished rent control but retained the restriction on the landlords ability to evict tenants on a periodic agreement without providing a just cause stated in the legislation.

Queensland property law reforms of the mid 1970s reviewed a range of legislation, and along with the Henderson poverty inquiry, eventually

led to passage of the Queensland *Residential Tenancies Act (1975)* (RTA). Despite separating out commercial and residential tenancies, the RTA continued to consider tenants and landlords as consumers and traders, and legislation as a tool to deliver consumer safeguards whilst

balancing the interests of the parties. Arguable the safeguards were not strong. Security of tenure clauses were included in early drafts of the RTA but removed following consultation, leaving Queensland tenants with much weakened protections.



Poster art provided by Tenants Queensland

The RTA still forms the basis for today's tenancy laws though significant improvements and clarifications occurred over time. Balancing the interests of the parties within a consumer trader framework persists as the focus and protections remain relatively weak.

Even the strongest consumer protections, however, fail to consider the fundamental difference between the parties in residential tenancy.

Tenants are seeking something more complex than a simple service; they are seeking a place to make their home. Their key issues are tenure security, the quality and appropriateness of premises, and affordability. Despite evidence showing the health, education and social benefits of stable housing, housing rights (the right to adequate and secure housing) is lacking as a consideration in tenancy laws across Australia.¹

Legislative reviews commonly aim to 'balance the rights and interests of landlords and tenants' tinkering with current provisions. Despite significant changes to the Australian housing system and the role of the private rental market, law reform processes fail to consider whether a new frame of reference is appropriate.

Though unacknowledged as such, the private rental market is the housing policy response by governments to the needs of low to moderate households. The laws however, are no longer fit for purpose, written at a time when renting was a transitional tenure between family of origin and a (owned) home of one's own.

Queensland Renters Today

Just short of one in five of Australia's renting households live in Queensland. The 2016 ABS Census,² shows that 34.2 per cent of Queensland households rent, a full percentage higher than the 2011 Census³ and well above the national average of 30.9 per cent.

Queensland has the highest percentage of renters of any state or territory (except the Northern Territory which has significantly fewer households overall). In absolute rented household numbers, Queensland is the third largest — 566,500 — with an additional 260,000



Poster art provided by Tenants Queensland

households in New South Wales (NSW) and 40,000 in Victoria.

The private rental market houses the majority of households living in housing stress.⁴ 12.8 per cent of Queensland renting households pay more than 30 per cent of their income in rent compared to the national average of 11.5 per cent and Queensland owner-occupiers at 6.3 per cent.

In increasing numbers, it is low to moderate income households, locked out of the great Australian dream of home ownership and increasingly restricted in eligibility for social housing who rely on the private rental market over the long-term.

Renters' Experiences

Renters are getting a raw deal. Numerous reports (for example, *Leaking Roofs*⁵, *Better Lease on Life*⁶ (NATO 2010), *Avoidable Evictions... our next move*⁷ have outlined tenants' fear of exercising their rights, the propensity for landlords to use 'without ground' termination notices to mask retaliatory or discriminatory actions and the lack of flexibility and security in tenure.

Earlier this year, Choice, the National Association of Tenant Organisations (NATO) and National Shelter released *Unsettled: Life in the Australian Rental Market*,⁸ a report of a nationally representative survey of renters' experiences. Again, these common issues arose. Renters expressed fear

in and insecurity about their tenure, many living with serious repair issues. Further, half were worried about being listed on a tenancy database and the majority felt unable to ask for changes in their property.

In all Australian jurisdictions,⁹ renters can be asked to leave their home without being given reasons. When a fixed term is ending or when a tenant is on a periodic agreement, the lessor maintains the discretion to end a tenancy at their will and convenience 'without grounds'. Fixed terms in Queensland are commonly for six months, sometimes 12, with little flexibility for starting other than in January and July, or for 'rolling over' into a periodic agreement.

Within this context, tenants live with a perpetual and underlying threat of having to move and the financial and social impacts that brings. This fear of eviction underpins most other issues experienced by renters, often muting expression of the rights they do have. Those living in marginal tenures, often struggling with affordability, feel these issues acutely.

The power differential between lessors and tenants is stark. Once a tenant moves into a property, they enter a monopoly-like relationship with their landlord. They are not free to move their business down the road the next week if they see cheaper rent, better amenity or more favorable terms. When there is a dispute between the parties, the law inadequately protects tenants and their tenure. Tenants often make tradeoffs to avoid receiving a 'without ground' eviction — the landlord's trump card.

Addressing the issue of tenure security is fundamental to improving experiences of private rental tenants and moving toward a level playing field in the Australian housing market.

Tenancy laws for a Modern World — A Just Cause for All Tenancy Terminations

Long-term lease options are the often-suggested response to the current situation. This is not, however, the position held by NATO.

In Queensland and other jurisdictions, the availability of long fixed term leases already exists. Landlords show little appetite to use them, preferring

to maintain flexibility over their asset. For tenants, whilst longer lease terms are somewhat desirable, they bring the risk of high financial liability if the tenant needs, unexpectedly, to move.

NATO and its members continue to call for the introduction of 'just cause' evictions (or terminations). *Just cause* involves amending tenancy laws to take away the ability to end agreements for no reason, and including in the law all reasonable grounds for terminating a tenancy. For a landlord to end a tenancy, a reasonable ground must apply. Fixed-term tenancy agreements would continue to protect tenants from all termination grounds except those related to serious breaches of the agreement.

Reasonable grounds are those things reasonable within the contemporary Australian housing system and would include the landlord or their family moving into the property, re-purposing of the premises, major repairs or renovation and serious or persistent breaches by the tenant.

Delivering Just Outcomes for Renters

The underlying principle for *just cause* evictions is the right for tenants to stay in their homes unless there is a legislated and just cause for them to move. Delivering on them would fundamentally improve the quality of life for Queensland's private renters. Implementing them requires a cultural shift. It requires lawmakers to focus on what we are delivering to renters through tenancy law, driving outcomes in quality and security. It also seeks a social good from property investors, not simply a product, in return for the generous taxation treatment they receive. This is not a big ask.

NATO and other tenant advocates have long advocated for the introduction of *just cause* evictions, arguing it would provide a solid basis for tenants to pursue other rights such as getting repairs done. To date, the calls have been unsuccessful.

However, there is a groundswell of unhappy renters and surely, it is only a matter of time before they influence policy makers.

Both NSW and Victoria are in the middle of tenancy law reviews. Currently Queensland has a bill in

Parliament introducing a head of power for regulating standards in rental properties. A broader tenancy law review aiming to 'create a more contemporary legislative framework' and 'better protect tenants and landlords to improve housing stability for people living in the private market' is likely to commence soon.

A New South Wales Government Minister quoted in Hansard recently stated, 'the Government is looking at how it can improve security of tenure for renters in New South Wales.'

In October, standing alongside his Housing Minister Martin Foley, the Victoria Premier declared his commitment to a raft of changes to tenancy laws. Some of the proposals suggest the Victorian Government is taking seriously the need for a different and fairer deal for renters.

Whilst not going all the way to implementing the NATO supported position of *just cause* evictions, it is proposed to limit the use of 'end of a fixed term' (a without reason eviction by another name) to the end of the first term of a tenancy. Following that, a reasonable ground set out in law is required.

Another proposal aimed at increasing renters' choice to keep pets, requires consent from the landlord but prevents them from unreasonably withholding it. Similar changes for minor modifications are suggested,

though tenants may be required to use a suitably qualified builder. The effectiveness of these latter proposals rest on the success of the former. Without tenure security, few tenants will take their dispute about keeping Fluffy to the tenancy tribunal.

Conclusion

For many years, tenant advocates have argued for the abolition of tenancy terminations without any grounds, that is, for *Just Cause Terminations*. Yet, despite an increasing reliance on the private rental market for growing numbers of low to moderate income households, no state or territory has yet moved to adequately protect the security of renters' homes.

Property investors received generous taxation benefits through negative gearing and reduced capital gains liability. We need to be asking residential property investors for a social-good contribution in exchange.

It is just time for *just cause*.

NB. As we go to print the NSW Labor opposition have announced their support of having a fair ground for all terminations.

Endnotes

1. National Association of Tenant Organisations NATO 2004, *Leaking Roofs*, Tenants Union of NSW
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, *Census QuickStats Queensland*.
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016, *ibid*.
4. Housing stress occurs when a household pays more than 30 per cent of their gross income in housing costs and income is within the bottom 40 per cent of Australian income distribution.
5. NATO 2004, *op cit*.
6. NATO 2010, *A Better Lease on Life — Improving Australian Tenancy Law*; https://tenantsqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/A_Better-Lease_on_Life_April.pdf
7. Tenants Union of Queensland (2012), *Avoidable Evictions...our next move*, Tenants Union of Queensland <https://tenantsqld.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Avoidable-Evictions-our-next-move.pdf>
8. Choice, National Shelter, NATO 2017, *Unsettled — Life in Australia's private rental market*, http://www.shelter.org.au/sites/natshelter/files/public/documents/The_per_cent20Australian_per_cent20Rental_per_cent20Market_per_cent20Report_per_cent20Final_per_cent20Web.pdf
9. Except in Tasmania where a ground in legislation must be provided. However, a landlord may end the agreement using the ground 'end of the fixed term tenancy' if they are within 60 days from the end of the fixed term and the fixed term's end date.



Poster art provided by Tenants Queensland

Supplying Affordable Housing: Challenges and Solutions

Jamie Muchall, Chief Operations Officer, Horizon Housing

Given the audience of this publication, it should be unnecessary to argue that there is a significant lack of affordable and social housing supply in Queensland and that this lack of supply needs to be addressed in order to reduce homelessness.¹ Despite some previous progress in the 'golden years' of community housing with the introduction of National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) and the Nation Building and Economic Stimulus program, as a state we still struggle to resolve the problem of providing sufficient affordable and social housing in areas where it is most needed. This is the number one cause of homelessness.² Unfortunately, the current operating environments both nationally and in Queensland provide additional headwinds that make progress harder to achieve than ever before.

The Queensland Government is to be commended for acknowledging the need for more affordable and social housing in its new ten year housing strategy. However, the strategy falls short of providing any significant funding or programs to deliver the additional supply beyond an initial investment of \$180 million each year over the ten years.³ The Queensland Government suggests that social housing is best delivered by the public sector and tasks the community housing sector with solving the problem of affordable and transitional housing.

However, even if this strategy could be successful, we are at the mercy of a political environment across Australia that makes future planning and investing challenging. The investment decisions and future programs of community housing providers (CHPs) are deeply dependent or impacted on by government policy, to an extent much greater than in the private

sector. Stability or at least predictability is therefore essential to traditional social and affordable housing development. It is an understatement to say we do not have this in Queensland or nationally. We have minority governments at both the Queensland and at Federal levels, as well as a pending election in Queensland that may yield an even more tenuous government.

What can be done? One theme is clear — that CHPs cannot afford to be reliant on a single government funding stream in order to achieve their mission. We simply do not have time to wait for government to come to the table. However, there are a number of potential innovative models being trialled or that have the potential to deliver solutions.

One is collaboration, bringing together a range of different parties to target the issue. Horizon Housing recently completed its *Reserve and Hundred Hills* development, a partnership that brought together a CHP, the Federal Government, the Tweed Shire Council, Stockland, Bank Australia and Foresters Community Finance. The project then utilised cross-subsidisation by delivering 54 housing outcomes; 32 second-mortgage affordable house and land packages for sale, the proceeds for which part-funded the construction of 22 affordable rental homes that will be retained by Horizon to be rented to eligible residents for 75 per cent of the market rent. While some in the development industry are promoting build-to-rent as a potential solution to affordable housing, this is at market rent; it certainly is not viable when you are providing the rentals at a discount.⁴ It is, however, possible to do so when you are subsidising the financing of those homes with profits from sales in other developments.

Another approach the sector is embracing is innovative funding and product solutions, such as those of the Launch Housing model in Victoria, for-purpose real estate agencies such as Evolve's Echo Realty and Coast2Bay's Purpose Real Estate. These have the benefits of being self-funding and not at the whim of government policy shifts. The downside, however, is the additional risk it brings to providers; being self-funding they need to concern themselves with competition, markets, and returns.

Providing social housing at scale through these entities, then, is an unlikely proposition. The sector also has numerous initiatives underway to deliver new financial products, such as shared equity and rent to buy. Horizon partnered recently with Social Ventures Australia and HESTA to invest in Australian Affordable Housing Securities, a for-profit financial services company, to provide both an additional revenue stream to reinvest into housing development and as a vehicle for the development of new financial models and products for affordable housing.

However, these models are challenging to deliver, within a heavily regulated financial services sector that is reluctant to support new ideas. While we should watch these innovations with interest, it is likely to take time to see scale-solutions that are widely adopted.

Perhaps, one green shoot, is that affordable housing is finally on the national BBQ agenda like never before. It is important that as a sector we nurture this opportunity to bring to the political arena a wider discussion of social housing supply, homelessness and affordable housing. The sad reality is that without government funding social housing cannot exist at the scale that is required.

Therefore, we need to build the public recognition of the value of social housing and promote a desire to direct some of our tax dollars to the problem, and a will amongst both sides of politics to budget for the delivery of new social and affordable housing at the level that is needed. The advantage of success here is that significant funding can actually be unlocked to deliver large-scale outcomes that can make a dent in the problem.

It would be tempting to suggest that a simply defined problem — not enough housing — would have a simple solution. Nevertheless, as we

know, while the problem might be simply-defined, it has many complex causes. A range of different solutions will be required to overcome the challenges we currently face. However, based on the current projects that are underway, I am optimistic, that this sector has the skills, the capacity, the knowledge and more importantly, the will, to succeed.

Endnotes

1. Rowley S, Leishman C, Baker E, Bentley R and Lester L 2017, *Modelling housing need in Australia to 2025*, AHURI Final Report No. 287, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/287>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-8106901, p35; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, (2017) *Housing Assistance in Australia 2017*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2017>.
2. Homelessness Australia 2014, *Homelessness in Queensland*, Homelessness Australia, ACT.
3. Department of Housing and Public Works, 2017, *Queensland Housing Strategy 2012–2027*, Department of Housing and Public Works, Queensland Government, Brisbane p.1.
4. Affordable Housing Working Group 2017, *Supporting the implementation of an affordable housing bond aggregator*, Affordable Housing Working Group, Council on Federal Financial Relations, Australian Government, ACT, p. 12.



Australian's First Rental Vulnerability Index

Penny Carr, Chief Executive Officer, Tenants Queensland

Tenants Queensland (TQ) launched the first ever Rental Vulnerability Index (RVI) last May.

Originally conceived as a service-planning tool for TQ's delivery of the Queensland Statewide Tenant Advice and Referral Services (QSTARS), its usefulness will expand over time.

Commissioned by Tenants Queensland and developed in conjunction with the City Futures Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, the RVI defines rental vulnerability as the vulnerability of people to problems that may make their rental housing unaffordable, insecure or inappropriate thereby indicating a need for tenant advisory services. It combines 13 independent indicators of rental vulnerability, falling under two topics — 'housing' and 'people'. Using a principal component analysis, an Index number between zero and one is generated; the higher the number the greater the rental vulnerability.

The RVI presents as an interactive heat map identifying rental vulnerability at postcode level. Inserting a postcode into the search function reveals the RVI for that postcode area. The values for each of the area's housing and people indicators are also shown along with other tenancy related data.

The RVI 'housing' indicators are defined by rental stress, tenancy dispute applications, numbers of social housing dwellings, residential services (boarding houses) and manufactured home sites (residential parks).

'People' indicators of vulnerability include tenants with a disability, unemployed tenants, single parent tenants, indigenous tenants, young tenants (18 to 24 years), older tenants

(65 years and above) and tenants with a low-level of education.

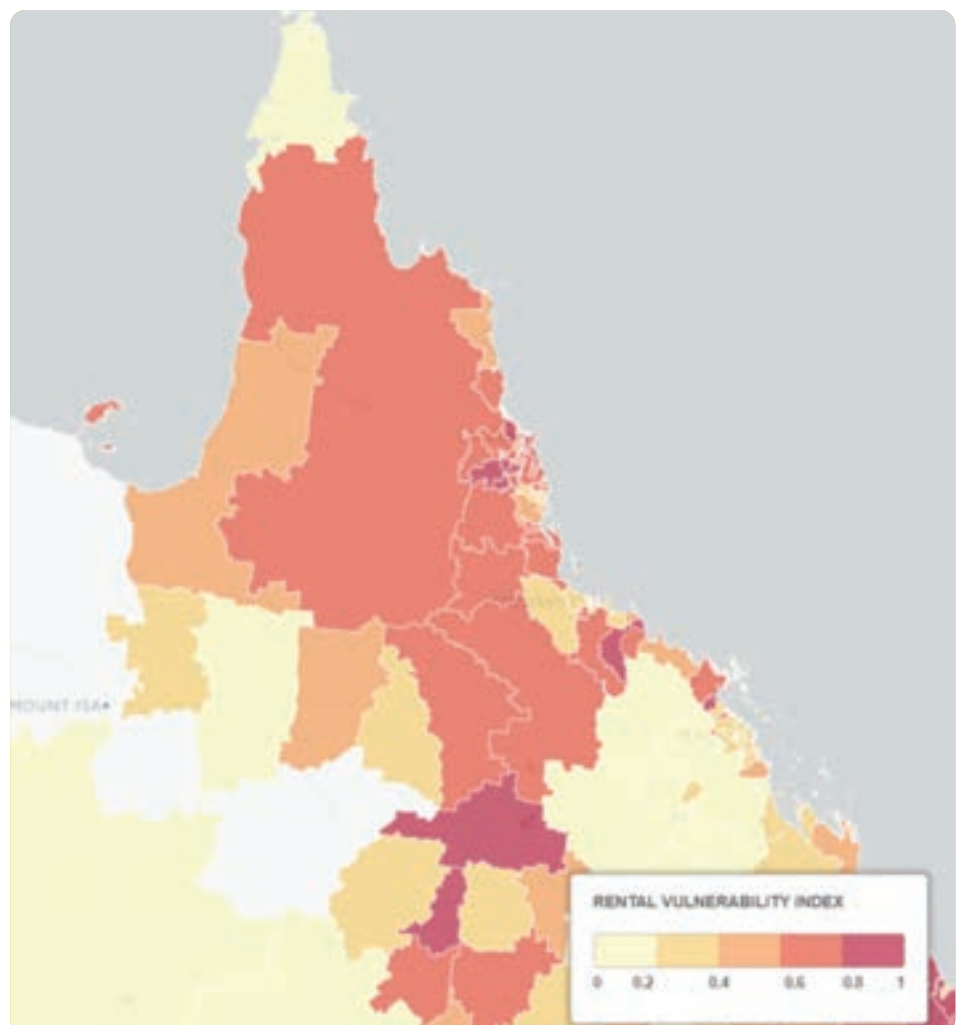
Australian Bureau of Statistics Census and Queensland Government open source data have been used to create the tool. With the release of the 2016 Census data, an update of the RVI is underway. As regular updates follow, trend data will emerge providing a second dimension to our understanding of rental vulnerability.

In its first iteration, the Rental Vulnerability Index shows the highest impact in regional Queensland, particularly in areas north of the

Sunshine Coast and inland of the Gold Coast. It shows that many vulnerable households, pushed out to the urban fringe and regional areas in search of cheaper housing, are still facing rental stress.

The RVI provides excellent insights for TQ to better align demand, response and need for tenant advisory services across the state and will provide a useful tool for many other service provider organisations.

You can find the RVI here: <https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/cityviz/rental-vulnerability-index/>



The Ache for Home: Rental Affordability in Brisbane

Leanne Wood, Research, Social Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Anglicare Southern Queensland

Over the past eight years, Anglicare Australia has conducted the annual *Rental Affordability Snapshot*, to highlight the lived experience of people and families on low-incomes trying to find a home in the private rental market.¹ Sadly, what is distinctive about the *Snapshot* is the sheer consistency of the results, right across the country, over that period.

In short — year after year, the private rental market has been shown to be out of reach of the vast majority of people in receipt of benefits, or on the minimum wage.²

In 2017, Anglicare Southern Queensland evaluated more than 8,000 properties in the Brisbane metro area. Only 99 (1 per cent) could be considered affordable and appropriate for households on income support, with the situation particularly dire for families on Parenting Payment or Newstart. Renting a two-bedroom property in Brisbane can absorb from 64 per cent to 76 per cent of the household income for a single parent on benefits with one child.

A single person earning the minimum wage would have to spend 59 per cent of their weekly income to rent a one-bedroom property at \$350 per week; and that same rent would cost a single person on the aged or disability pension 70 per cent of their household income. Similarly, a room in a shared rental would cost a student 70 per cent of the Youth Allowance.³

It's little wonder that 'room sharing has become the new flat sharing', as Christian Tietz suggests in a recent article.⁴ While Tietz's research refers particularly to Sydney, it only needs a cursory search on Gumtree to see that the trend exists in Brisbane as

well, with advertisements for inner city apartment room-sharing including a corner of a living room in a unit 'shared with only three girls' (\$120/week) and 'three people in one room, two in the other room' (\$175).

This cannot be attributed just to a willingness to sacrifice personal space for an inner-city 'lifestyle'. The Anglicare Brisbane *Snapshot* revealed that the median advertised rent for a room in a share rental was \$165 per week in 2017. A Brisbane 'rent map' based on listings on a 'flatmates' accommodation site shows that shared rentals near public transport (specifically train stations) are almost all higher than that figure, certainly within about a 20 kilometre radius of the city.⁵ It does not take sophisticated calculations to work out that a single person on a minimum wage or less, renting a room in a shared house and potentially factoring in transport costs, is facing as precarious an existence as the room-sharer living on the edge of homelessness — lacking a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety and

the ability to control their living space.⁶ This is the proverbial choice between the devil and the deep blue sea.

It also raises the issue of 'appropriate' accommodation. The Brisbane families in the 'best' position of all those surveyed in the Anglicare *Snapshot* were families of four with at least two minimum wages, with just over 1,000 properties (12 per cent of the total) both affordable and 'appropriate' for this household type. That of course assumes that the families in question don't also face other challenges in finding an appropriate dwelling — that proximity to work, or availability and cost of transport aren't issues; and that no one in the family has a disability. Even owning a cat or dog reduces the number of properties that are available.

These are not fussy demands. They are things that everyday families and individuals think about and negotiate when they are looking for a home.



Photo provided by Anglicare Southern Queensland

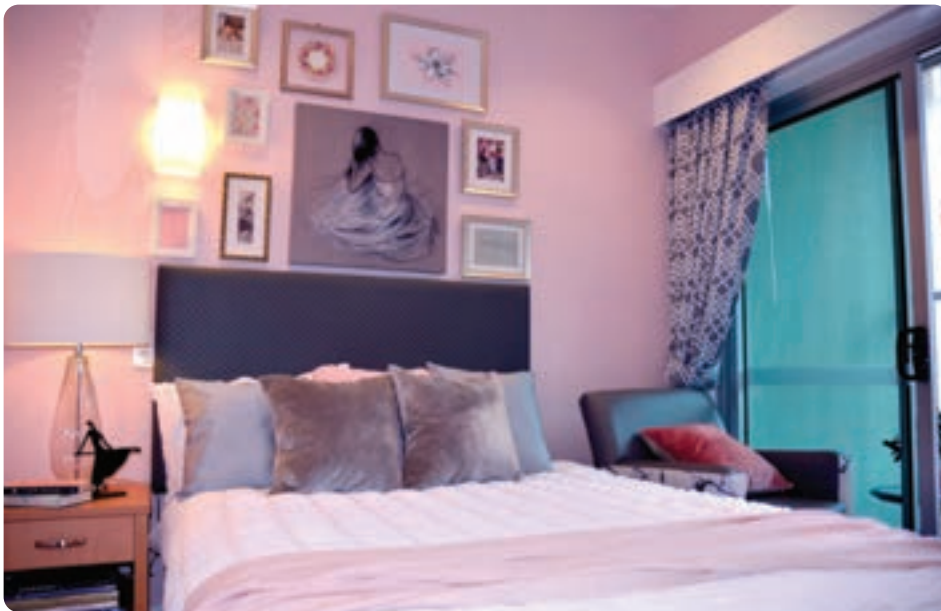


Photo provided by Anglicare Southern Queensland

The difference is that people on low-incomes have far fewer options to consider, and the *Snapshot* shows that some have almost no options at all. This is even without taking into account the further vulnerability of those identified in community consultation carried out by the Queensland Government.

Finding and sustaining safe, secure accommodation — a home — is likely to be even harder for a long list of Queenslanders, including seniors, young people transitioning from care, people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, people with a disability, people experiencing a mental health issue, families escaping domestic and family violence, people impacted by drug and alcohol use, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people exiting custody, returned services people and, yes — even people with a pet.⁷

Even the Australian Bureau of Statistics now recognises that *homelessness* is not the same as *rooflessness*.⁸ Home is where we spend time with those we love, make memories, enjoy our privacy. It's a space we can make our own, helping us find the peace and stability to take on all the other parts of our lives.

Poet and activist Maya Angelou wrote: *'The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned.'*⁹ It's a right that an increasing number of individuals and families are being denied.

Endnotes

1. Anglicare Australia 2017, *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, Canberra, anglicaresq.org.au/news/rental-affordability-snapshot/
2. See also, for example, Copp J 2010, *Benefit Recipients Reliant on Shared Accommodation*, *Parity* vol.23, no.6, pp.53–54.
3. Anglicare Australia 2017, *Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot*, Canberra, p. 39, anglicaresq.org.au/news/rental-affordability-snapshot/
4. Tietz C 2017, Room sharing is the new flat sharing, *The Conversation*, 6 Oct., theconversation.com/room-sharing-is-the-new-flat-sharing-84359
5. 2017, *Brisbane Rent Map: What it costs to rent near a station in Brisbane*, flatmates.com.au/widgets/train-maps/brisbane
6. Tietz C 2017, op cit; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, 4922.0 — *Information Paper — A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main per cent20Features2012?open document&tabn](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20features%202012?open document&tabn)
7. Queensland Government Housing Strategy Consultation Summary 2016, p.13, [www.hpw.qld.gov.au/SiteCollection Documents/HousingStrategyConsultation Report.pdf](http://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/HousingStrategyConsultationReport.pdf)
8. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, 4922.0 — *Information Paper — A Statistical Definition of Homelessness*, 2012, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main per cent20Features2012?opendocument&tabn](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4922.0Main%20features%202012?opendocument&tabn)
9. Maya A 1986, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Penguin Random House.



Photos provided by Anglicare Southern Queensland

More Than Housing: More Than a Home: Once I Was Homeless...

Kaitlyn Crothers, Tenant Engagement Coordinator, Brisbane Housing Company

For many people, being homeless can mean a lot more than not having a roof over your head. Homelessness, and the threat of homelessness, not only disrupts how you live day to day, but also an individual's goals and dreams. When you do not have secure housing, necessities like eating a warm meal, finding somewhere to sleep, or even managing existing health issues are the daily priority. Finding work, giving back to the community or just achieving personal goals can easily become out of reach.

Brisbane Housing Company (BHC) is an affordable housing company based in Queensland, and although our purpose is to provide affordable housing, we understand that accessing safe, long-term housing is often just the first step in an individual's journey. BHC has been delivering homes and creating liveable communities for the past 15 years and has proudly been able to assist more 13,000 households in that time, with many tenants finding comfort, empowerment and motivation in their newfound security. Here at BHC we know that a home is only the first step in the journey for many of our tenants.

Seven years ago Glenis was on the verge of homelessness, she was unemployed and seeking safety and security. The truth is homelessness and financial instability can happen to any of us at any time. Glenis found BHC in 2010 and was offered accommodation in an 80-unit, inner-city complex.

'For many of us... [it's] been life-changing. It provides us with somewhere to rebuild, recoup, reconsider our lives and retrain for the future.'

Like many, finding long-term affordable housing with BHC has meant that Glenis can refocus on her future. Since 2010, Glenis has flourished in her ambition to become a yoga instructor, and has even taken the next steps in turning what started as a hobby into a business. Glenis has practiced yoga since 2001 and four years ago, after attending a public class, had the realisation *I could do this!* She then started training to become an instructor, originally offering classes in the community centre of her building for a gold coin donation. Embracing this new direction and new beginning has enriched Glenis' life and brought her great joy.

'Whether BHC residents or local office workers... [I] see how their lives have changed. They've become empowered... It's different for everyone.'

Since her tentative beginnings, Glenis has undergone numerous training courses, including specialist Trauma Sensitive Yoga training that focuses on people who have suffered trauma, mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder.

'Trauma Sensitive Yoga creates a space that is safe for them... [They] find their way home; back to their body... it's a safe space. They have choice and power over their own body.'

Glenis' business as a yoga instructor grew organically and she now teaches nine classes a week, including weekly classes at two hospitals, filling in for instructors at the Brisbane City Council staff gym and continuing to offer community classes. This year Glenis continued

to grow her vision for her business, with BHC sponsoring her to attend a ten-week business course.

'I'm excited about the future. I'm looking at my business in a whole different way...'

After being on the brink of homelessness, finding BHC and long-term housing has given Glenis the opportunity to create a future of her choosing and explore the possibilities open to her, with a community of support behind her.

For some, homelessness is the only alternative to dangerous circumstances and a hard choice an individual makes for themselves. Gerard found himself making that difficult choice in 2011 after spending almost three years in an unstable boarding house. This was not the first time Gerard had been homeless, estimating that over the years he had spent at least five years of his life living on the streets. After leaving the boarding house, Gerard spent eight months living in Brisbane's New Farm Park before the devastating 2011 Brisbane floods took place. Although most of the homeless living in the parks had been moved to the showgrounds where emergency support was being given, Gerard recalls being one of the last in New Farm Park, only leaving himself when the water got too high.

'The floods were just like a war zone. 8pm I woke up and the water was rising, by 11pm New Farm had gone under.'

As devastating as the floods were, they became the catalyst for change in Gerard's life. A week after seeking support at the showgrounds, Gerard was offered a property with BHC.



Brisbane street art

More than five years on, Gerard is still happily housed with BHC and now a key member of his community. He is involved in the local community touch football, volunteers regularly with Red Cross, runs a very successful community art group The Green Square Community Amazing Art Project and he continues to support the homeless and vulnerable members of the community as best he can.

'If I was homeless I couldn't do this. [BHC]... it saved me ... and has given me hope. Gerard started his art group in September 2016 and after beginning as a small group for the tenants in his building, it quickly grew to be an all-inclusive weekly program open to all members of the community. He is passionate about creating a safe and inclusive place for the entire community to come together and express themselves, including the homeless and vulnerable.'

'When I was homeless I just wanted to find a place and forget society. Lots of people who have been homeless just want to lock away.'

Gerard or 'The Art Man' as he is often called, has flourished the support of local council and politicians and was the recipient of the Australasian Housing Institute's 2017 *Tenant Led Initiative Award*, and will be representing Queensland at the national awards in November. Gerard is a proud Indigenous artist and an invaluable part of his community.

'You've gotta be a leader, to be a leader... I have an urge to help the homeless, I come from homelessness and want to help, [and] encourage.'

Community can take many forms; it can be found in strangers, family members and people with a shared experiences, or just individuals who live in the same location. However many people who find themselves homeless are all too aware that community is not always available. Pauline found herself isolated and without support when her undiagnosed bi-polar disorder left her manic and unemployable. After a series of devastating life events and losses in 2010, Pauline lost her job and fell off the grid in 2011; she began abusing drugs and entered a year-long psychosis. During this time she was evicted from her home, black-listed on TICA, alienated herself from family and friends and began a volatile relationship. It was another year later, after constant hospital admissions that Pauline was finally diagnosed with bi-polar type one and PTSD. After struggling for years alone, dealing with what she thought was chronic depression, Pauline was able to get support from her father and ex-husband and live with them as she began her recovery. For three and a half years Pauline was in and out of hospital as she struggled to find the right mix of medication to support her mental health and come to terms with her diagnosis.

'Compassion can come from unexpected places.'

Having support from key members of her family and being assigned a community mental health nurse was a turning point and ultimately what led Pauline to secure long-term affordable housing with BHC.

In early 2017 Pauline moved into her new home with BHC and began the process of building a new life, one where she had support from the health care system, awareness of her mental illness and a growing community of friends and family, some of whom have shared experiences and are able to respect her boundaries whilst being immensely supportive.

'What people don't realise about mental health is the importance of environment. A stable home is so important.'

Now that Pauline has found a sense of community and security in her new home, she has been able to embrace her penchant for writing. She writes passionate, honest prose which explores moments of her life and delves into the perpetual struggle that is mental illness. Pauline is currently applying for a literature grant, which she hopes will enable her to write series of short stories about her experiences and journey with mental health.

'The transition to housing is life changing... In my writing I want to show the light. I have amazing relationships now; a family, a community.'

Unfortunately, homelessness is not rare, it can be seen all across Australia, and it does not discriminate in who it affects. Whilst homelessness will not be solved solely with the increased supply of safe and affordable housing, there is no doubt that long-term affordable housing paired with inclusive and supportive communities can make a significant difference in the lives of those who need it. Everyone must choose how they take their next steps in life and BHC will proudly to continue to offer our tenants choices, empowerment and encouragement to embrace life's opportunities.

Housing is a Human Right, Not Simply a Human Service

Ross Westoby, Project Worker, Innovation, Performance and Evaluation
and Karyn Walsh, Chief Executive Officer, Micah Projects

People's lives change by being housed. Having a roof over one's head, a key to your own door, and stable tenure is more than just housing; it is a home. It provides a foundation for opportunity and stability, and enables people to establish and rebuild their lives. Without housing, people cannot find safety, privacy and dignity.

Being homeless or even being under enormous tenancy stress is not a choice and is extremely stressful — it takes a significant toll on the health and wellbeing of individuals and families. Living in poverty and in crisis without a home or at risk of losing that home and at the intersection of complex health systems, domestic and family violence, and discrimination has devastating physical and psychological consequences that can last a lifetime. Only by housing someone in a space they can afford, do people dream of changing the things that might prevent them from living a more meaningful and fulfilling life. But how do we ensure housing for all? The experience of homelessness as a child leaves lifetime memories and can often have lifetime consequences.

Housing needs to be affordable for low-income earners and supportive for those who need services and resources to sustain a tenancy and quality of life. Purchase price growth, rental growth and wage stagnation is at historically high rates and represents a major barrier for low and even moderate-income earners. People on Newstart Allowance, Disability Support Pension and in low-skill jobs are paying over 40 per cent of their wage or their benefit, even including the rental assistance scheme, to sure up anything in the private market. This is not sustainable.

A new report by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has found:

*'...the extent of housing need in Australia, with 1.3 million households in housing need in 2017 — either unable to access market housing (around 525,000) or able to access the private rental market, but requiring support to avoid rental stress (800,000). The greatest need is in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland and the results reveal the extent of the affordable housing shortfall, providing evidence to support an increase in resources for the delivery of affordable housing, be it direct through government, in partnership with the private sector, via planning requirements, or by the community housing sector'*¹

With the exception of the period 1945–1956 when public housing burgeoned to meet the needs of returned soldiers and their new families after World War Two, and periods after this in the sixties and seventies, we are now in a period of record low social housing constructions.²

Currently in Queensland, 26,000 people are on the waitlist for social housing. Encouragingly, the Queensland Government has recently committed to the construction of 5,000 social housing homes over the next decade.³ Yet, despite this commitment, the above facts elucidate the sheer magnitude of the issues that low-income earners face, and the number of people on the waitlist shows that the government is still showing signs of being extremely reluctant landlords. The policy position that views public or social housing as being temporary and as a stepping stone to private rental, is

misguided and out of step with the realities of the market.

There are three critical issues, issues that if fully embraced, could create the solutions that would end homelessness and create the stability that people achieve when housed.

Firstly, for those of us working in this sector, there is no dispute that the provision of social housing is the appropriate solution to the key issue of housing affordability. While low-income earners can only afford to pay 30 per cent of their income on their housing, the market simply prevents this from being possible. We need to stop the stigma associated with public and social housing and respect the diversity of tenants and their circumstances.

Secondly, there needs to be a targeted and coordinated entry into housing where funded programs and interventions cut across the multiple domains that affect people's lives. This enables organisations to guide and match the right housing response and when needed, the right service response. Governments cannot go it alone, nor can individual non-government organisations. Homelessness is solvable.

Thirdly, ending homelessness involves prevention of first-time or episodic homelessness, interim housing to respond to crisis, and permanent housing with secure tenancy and appropriate support when it is needed. A coordinated system creates efficiencies and prevents further stigma and isolation. Most people who are homeless, or at-risk of homelessness, can be assessed and prioritised according to their need for either affordable housing or affordable housing and appropriate support services. It is possible to respond



Brisbane street art

quickly to these situations and it is possible to prevent new entries into homelessness by channelling these people into homelessness prevention services.

The use of the Vulnerability Index Service Prioritisation Decision Assistant Tool (VI-SPDAT) connects deeply with the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027 and the goal of the Action Plan's for the sector to customise packages of support and assistance appropriate to the needs and circumstances of individuals. The VI-SPDAT fulfils this very function by allowing services to match appropriate support and assistance based on level of acuity and need. This aligns with the Action Plan as individuals can then be diverted into affordable housing before homelessness takes root and further crisis points emerge. At the other end of the spectrum, those with multiple needs requiring support should be provided with more intense and wrap around support. These supports may be short-term or ongoing depending on whether people require supportive housing due to high, prolonged and ongoing needs.

Rather than assuming that the whole of public and social housing is for people with high support needs, supportive housing should be

allocated to those who need it most. Queensland needs to develop a plan that matches housing with the services provided by all government human services departments — a plan that determines what percentage of new housing stock should be allocated to supportive housing. Such a plan would need to identify which departments are interested in providing the investment for funding for services and what outcomes, alongside sustaining tenancies, is the investment focused on achieving. For example, do housing providers require a rental subsidy for the provision of supportive housing?

Supportive housing is appropriate and applicable to the needs of multiple population groups as it is grounded in strong partnerships that enable coordination between tenancy managers and community services workers. To be successful, supportive housing needs to be grounded in *policy, programs and practice* and provided on scale that is needed to meet demand in Queensland.

The discourse on housing needs to become one where housing is considered the 'right' of all people in Queensland, a right either provided by, or funded by the State. Likewise, we need to channel our collective

effort towards developing the partnerships and collaborations needed to provide the planning and investment required if we are to have any chance of creating the opportunities and the stability that is essential for the individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

For too long, stigma and isolation are the hallmarks of the experience of homelessness. What people need is simply a place to call home. While Australia has a history of creating safety nets, these are fast being taken away as increasingly the individual or family is being asked to bear the responsibility for costs and consequences of structural poverty and inequality.

Endnotes

1. Rowley S, Leishman C, Baker E, Bentley R and Lester L 2017, *Modelling housing need in Australia to 2025*, AHURI Final Report No. 287, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/287>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-8106901.
2. Hayward D 1996, The reluctant landlord? A history of public housing in Australia, *Urban Policy and Research*, vol.14, no.1, pp.5–35.
3. Department of Housing and Public Works 2017, *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*. Available at: www.hpw.qld.gov.au/housingstrategy/Documents/QldHousingStrategy.pdf Accessed 26th Sep 2017.

Housing and Homelessness in Rural Communities

Cheryl Prosser, Business Development Coordinator, Horizon Housing Company Ltd

For over three years, Horizon Housing's Roma office has managed 250 social and affordable housing properties spread across the Maranoa Region (population 13,000) and the Western Downs Region (population 32,500), as part of our 2,400-property portfolio in Queensland. This office is located a four-hour drive from the closest Department of Housing Service Centre in Toowoomba.

The Maranoa region covers an area of 58,830 square kilometres, the Western Downs an area of 38,039 square kilometres. The region is characterised by an ageing population and young people aged 14 years and under. Both regions experience drought, floods, economic boom and downturns, a lack of public transport, few amenities, high staff

turnover (across most agencies), few or no vacancies in aged care facilities and no detox or rehabilitation facilities.

Our Roma office has a team of three staff delivering tenancy and property management services across this broad geographic portfolio. Over 50 per cent of Horizon tenants living in these regions identify as Indigenous (45 per cent are young people) and 22 per cent are seniors (our oldest tenant is 93 years of age). An estimated 15 per cent are known to be experiencing domestic violence. One key challenge in the planning, delivery and management of housing services is the many assumptions on which services, policy and practice developed in urban settings are predicated but do not apply in rural/remote settings.

There is a strong historical and familial attachment to Roma for many residents. To work in these communities, you must become a part of them. The Roma office is very community focussed therefore several core business functions are managed by the Robina Head Office assisting staff to engage with the community and their events. Horizon plans a range of placemaking and engagement activities centrally. An Art and Photo competition in 2016 added a depth of understanding of the rural landscape, with a tenant living in our Roma portfolio winning a prize for her artwork depicting her home now proudly displayed in our office.

To reduce the sense of 'professional isolation' due to the rural/remote location, technology (although at times unreliable) is utilised to provide



Horizons display at a recent community event in Roma



Roma House Manager Elise Waugh congratulating Mitchell State Scholl, a recipient under Horizons Achieve Scholarship

professional support, share practice and importantly secure input to Horizons strategic, business or operational matters. Regular video/telephone conferencing with all Horizon business units ensures the rural/remote perspective is captured across all elements of our operations. Our monthly staff newsletter is a key communication tool (updating all staff on outcomes, challenges and future directions) with monthly updates on regional activities to inform our metropolitan based staff of the often-unique challenges of service delivery in these settings.

Routine activities such as property inspections, tenancy sign ups, vacates, home visits must be well planned and organised due to extended travel times and staff often having to go to the tenants (due to a lack of transport). Managing staff leave or unexpected absences can be a challenge with a small team. On the go problem solving and reprioritising of workloads are required skills when working in these environments.

The housing type, design (and often age) unique to the Queensland rural landscape and the harsh environmental factors present challenges that are often not well understood or recognised by those in metropolitan locations. The lack of low set adaptable housing impacting

on the ability to stay in a home and remain independent is common feedback across the communities. The housing may be of a type/design that no longer meets demand or expectations. Managing a mismatch between supply and demand (particularly relevant due to boom and bust cycles) and increased building costs (around 18 per cent to 50 per cent higher in rural/remote location than metropolitan areas) impact on the financial performance and viability of this housing portfolio.

Horizon recently relocated a staff member to Roma to undertake proactive asset management functions including property inspections and maintenance accountabilities. Because this expertise is not readily available in small rural locations, creatively utilising our in-house skills helps build our capacity.

Horizon has partnered with local agencies to bid for funds from government and the corporate philanthropic sectors. In August 2017, Horizon secured \$75,000 in funding from the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services under their Age Friendly Grants to initiate a unique research project across the Maranoa region to identify the housing challenges and aspirations of older people (aged 55 years and over) living in the Maranoa region. This project is in partnership with community, local services and providers and will be a vehicle to drive community consultations around ageing in place, identify specific impacts/barriers and then propose products/responses relevant to the housing needs of those ageing in rural and remote communities.

For the many people and households we work with, their community is their home and their place is as just as important to them as those living in metropolitan locations.



Horizons office in Roma

The Role of Neighbourhood Centres in Housing

Siobhan Delgado, Sector Development Officer,
Queensland Families and Communities Association

The Australian Neighbourhood Housing and Communities Association (ANHCA) describes neighbourhood centres as:

*'Neighbourhood Houses and Centres (NH&Cs) are not-for-profit, community organisations. They share a community development and socially inclusive approach to the delivery and provision of services, as well as activities for socially isolated and disadvantaged local communities.'*¹

Currently there are 147 funded and unfunded neighbourhood centres across Queensland. The primary source of funding for neighbourhood centres is from the Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Supports (DCCSDS). Other sources of funding are via federal government, local government or philanthropic grants.

In 2017, DCCSDS engaged Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS) to consult Queensland Neighbourhood Centres in gathering material to inform their Investment Management Standard (IMS) workshops.

These IMS workshops were designed to 'help organisations to direct their resources and achieve the best outcomes from their investments.'² QCOSS invited the Queensland Families and Communities Association (QFCA) to partner in this process. QCOSS and QFCA facilitated five community consultations between July and August 2017. A final report for the IMS workshops is in development.

The consultation process included face to face forums, one tele-link and a survey monkey. Currently DCCSDS funds 122 neighbourhood centres across the state. 117 participants

attended the five sessions, including the tele-link, representing 73 centres. Sixty seven centres responded to the survey with 27 respondents unable to attend the live forums. The consultation process engaged 100 of the 122 centres, representing 81 per cent of Centres state-wide.

The consultations included an overview of the purpose of IMS, a participative mapping process and a world café activity exploring the value of neighbourhood centres to their communities, the community service sector and the uniqueness of neighbourhood centres and the future of neighbourhood centres in Queensland.

Neighbourhood Centres and Housing

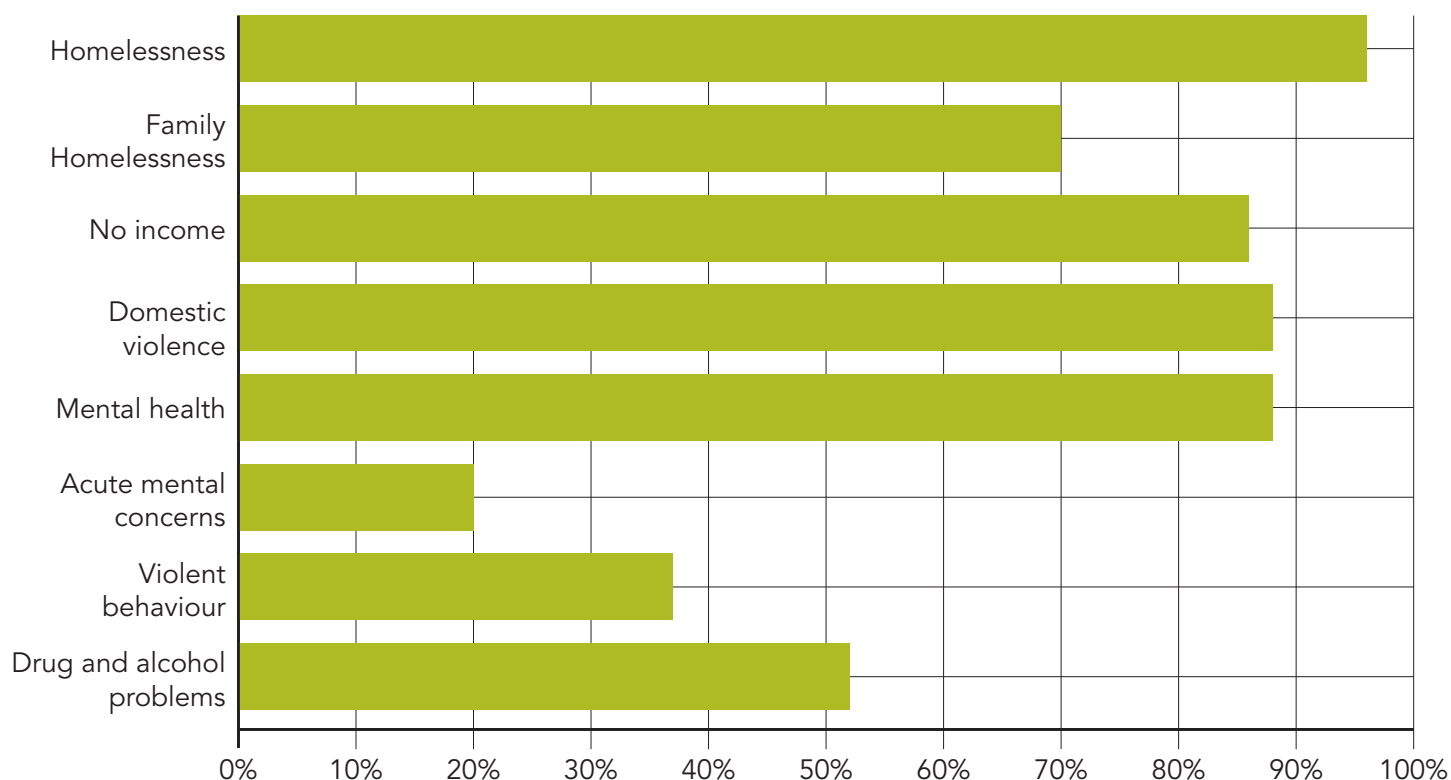
The mapping process at the live forums and via the survey monkey identified the depth of work undertaken by neighbourhood centres. DCCSDS fund centres to

provide information, support and referral as well as events and activities. Yet, as ANHCA has identified, neighbourhood centres hold community development and social inclusion at their core and this underpins every engagement they undertake. Funding representatives regularly state that 'it is not the role of a centre to deal with challenging issues or crisis interventions'. However, this commentary belittles the core elements of working within community and the role of neighbourhood centres. This was challenged throughout the consultation process.

All centre staff and volunteers deal with daily crisis presentations, and housing has been identified as one of the primary causes of crisis. Fifty four of the 67 (96.3 per cent) respondents to the survey monkey identified homelessness as a primary crisis presentation with 70.37 per cent identifying family homelessness as a major concern. Forty of the 67



Brisbane street art



Q18 Crisis Services (what crisis presentations are you seeing at your centre?)

Answered: 54 Skipped: 13

responded to a specific question on 'Housing and Homelessness Supports' with completing forms and advocacy as the main requirements of their work. While this was echoed throughout the consultations less than five per cent of neighbourhood centres receive funding direct from the Department of Housing.

When a person presents with a housing issue it takes time to work out the best responses for the individual and/ or their family. People presenting at neighbourhood centres are given time and attention and often a cup of tea (never underestimate the value of a cup of tea). Centre staff provide assistance with completing the necessary housing forms, whether they are hard copy or digital, and often help with the extra requirements for proof of identity and the provision of supporting evidence.

While the Department of Housing does have staff to address this work, many people struggle to attend a housing centre due to difficulty in accessing them or because of an inability to respond to the services offered. The reality is that very often individuals presenting in crisis struggle to represent themselves properly. This can in turn cause conflict in dealing with government services. During the IMS consultation process, neighbourhood

centres were often referred to as Hubs, universal services and/or place-based services. Many respondents considered them to be an essential service because neighbourhood centres are open to all community members and viewed as a safe space.

Vulnerable individuals and/or their families will often remain connected to their neighbourhood centre while they wait on the housing list or get housed in other ways. For individuals and families in crisis, neighbourhood centres provide emergency relief, food, food parcels and other sundry items. Centres offer breakfast, lunches and dinners for the homeless and where possible, provide showers and laundry services.

The face-to-face connection provided by neighbourhood centres reduces isolation, creates connectivity and increases the capacity of centre users to access other supports while remaining within their own community.

Throughout the IMS consultation process terms such as 'poly fila' and 'connectors' were used to identify how neighbourhood centres bridge the gaps in service before, during and after a need is identified. Participants throughout the consultations strongly supported this approach of being able to work with people across

presentations and without the restriction imposed through program eligibility.

Conclusion

Once the report is complete and the IMS workshops have concluded, neighbourhood centres in Queensland hope to have a clearer sense of future funding from the State Government. This consultation process has enabled greater unity across neighbourhood centres and opened opportunities to increase their visibility within and beyond the sector.

When asked about the future of neighbourhood centres, participants were unanimous about them 'continuing to do what they already do' for their communities. They want recognition for the work of neighbourhood centres and for their work to be valued because of the unique contribution they make to the welfare of their communities.

Endnotes

1. Australian Neighbourhood Housing and Communities Association 2011, *Strengthening Local Communities; Who we are and what we do*, Australian Neighbourhood Housing and Communities Association.
2. <http://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/Investment-Planning-and-Evaluation/Understanding-investment-planning-and-review/What-is-the-investment-management-standard>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Pathways

Department of Housing and Public Works

Summary

A look at the complex challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face when it comes to housing, and what the Queensland Government is doing to address this through the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan*.

Indigenous disadvantage is well-documented and this extends to housing where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are four times more likely to experience homelessness, and four times more likely to live in overcrowded conditions than non-Indigenous Queenslanders.¹

The *Closing the Gap Report 2017* details a disappointing lack of progress on the Closing the Gap targets. As a nation, we are on track to meet only one of the seven Closing the Gap targets.²

The Closing the Gap targets are focused on the Commonwealth Government's key priorities, including providing children with a positive start to life, increasing access to education and employment, reducing self-harm and violence and supporting victims of domestic violence.

Effectively addressing these key priorities all too frequently means addressing issues of inadequate housing and overcrowding.

Housing is a foundational issue in closing the gap on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

Adequate housing is essential to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, education and employment outcomes.

Overcrowding is a key cause behind many health issues such as scabies

and rheumatic fever. It is nearly impossible for families living in severely overcrowded or inadequate housing to keep themselves healthy. Simple everyday actions such as bathing, washing clothes and bedding, and removing waste safely are difficult or impossible when the housing is inadequate.

Education and employment outcomes are impacted through a lack of ability to bath, wash and iron clothes, to find a quiet space to undertake homework or study, to get adequate sleep when sleeping rough or sharing overcrowded lodgings.

Queensland is working to improve housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households through the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* (the strategy) by:

- developing an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan*
- establishing a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Body
- furthering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander home ownership
- increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and economic opportunities.

The strategy will increase access to safe, secure and affordable housing and provide pathways to achieve home ownership. Housing assistance packages will help vulnerable young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to pursue education, training and employment opportunities, while sustaining strong connections to community and culture. The strategy will also address the need for transitional housing and accommodation that meets the needs of both younger and senior client cohorts.

Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are:

- Four times more likely to be homeless compared with non-Indigenous people and this is increasing — at only 3.6% of the population, they account for 9% of the total homelessness population
- Two times more likely to be renting (63.3% Indigenous compared to 32% non-Indigenous)
- More likely to be renting through some form of social housing
- More vulnerable to homelessness or living in overcrowded situations due to private market trends, discrimination and security of tenancy issues
- Three times less likely to own their own homes (9.4% as compared to 29.8%)
- Four times more likely to be living in overcrowded housing (13.6% compared to 3.4%)
- Experiencing overcrowding in approximately 30% of Indigenous households in remote or very remote areas
- 13% of Queensland's Indigenous population live in remote communities
- 97% of the Indigenous population in remote communities live in social housing

As at Census 2016:

- Around 186,500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in Queensland, accounting for 4% of the total Queensland population (up from 3.6% at Census 2011)
- More than half (60.61%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were aged under 29 years.

The strategy highlights our commitment to working collaboratively and innovatively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. The principles outlined in the Department of Housing and Public Works *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advancement Framework 2017–2020* will form the foundation for partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities:

- effective co-design
- inform and empower people and communities
- develop agreed goals
- inform decisions with quality data and evidence.

An example of this approach is the development of the ten-year *Yarrabah Housing and Homelessness Strategy* that aims to empower the community to take control of Yarrabah's future through positive changes that ensure all residents have the option of a safe, secure and functional home appropriate for their family's lifestyle. It is a locally-led, place-based and people-centred initiative involving all members of the community.

In 2017, the Yarrabah Aboriginal Shire Council undertook a thorough analysis of housing within the Shire to obtain a complete understanding of the full extent of the community's housing challenges. The council determined that a locally-led and delivered



solution was required, with local government spearheading the positive changes. Yarrabah's solution will be developed based on the following foundations; it will be people-centred — *dignity, place-based — respect* and have an interdisciplinary approach — *knowledge*.

Work has begun on developing the strategy and many social issues within Yarrabah can be related back to overcrowding. The Department of Housing and Public Works will work collaboratively with the council and local community to develop a stronger future for Yarrabah.

'Yarrabah is home. It's where we grew up. It's our people. We feel safe here, part of something. We've got to treasure it, it's a haven for our children. I would like a home, something to make my kids proud of and so they can have a future.'

— Jason Cameron Fourmile, Yarrabah resident

Endnotes

1. *Census 2011*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Government, Canberra.
2. *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2017*, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Australian Government, Canberra.



Brisbane street art

Systematic Improvement of Housing in the Aboriginal Community of Cherbourg

Phil Crane and Sean Nicholson*

Acknowledgement to Traditional Owners

The Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council respectfully acknowledges the Wakka Wakka peoples who are the traditional owners of the land on which we are based, and we pay our respects to our Elders past and present. We also wish to acknowledge the historical peoples who were sent here and made Cherbourg their home. With many tribes in our one community, we strive to combine all of our services and skills, and are committed to reducing all inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Introduction

This paper outlines the strategy used in recent years to enhance the quality of housing and lived experience for people in the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg. Contrary to the common depiction of Aboriginal communities as having low quality housing, this article outlines a strategic approach over the past decade which has resulted in the enhancement of housing stock, associated infrastructure and the lived experience of the residents of Cherbourg.

Cherbourg is located 270 km north-west of Brisbane, covers an area of 32 square kilometres, and has a population of approximately 1,300 people.¹

The history of Cherbourg (or Barambah as it was originally known) provides an important context for outlining recent housing developments in the community. Barambah was established by the Salvation Army in 1899, and taken over as a Government Settlement in 1904.² People were moved there from all over Queensland and New South Wales under the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld)*. Between 1905 and 1939 there were approximately 2,079 documented removals of Aboriginal people to Barambah Reserve.³

Traditional languages and practices were restricted, permission was required to leave the Reserve or to marry, and children were removed from families and placed in dormitories. The impact of this history is still felt, with higher than average levels of unemployment, poverty, housing stress, incarceration, and mental health issues, especially youth suicide.⁴

The Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council was established in 1985 'under the Community Services (Aborigines) Act 1984 (Qld), when local government powers and responsibilities were conferred upon Aboriginal councils for the first time. An Aboriginal reserve held by the Queensland Government was transferred on 28 August 1986 to

the trusteeship of the council under a Deed of Grant in Trust'.⁵

Development of Housing in Cherbourg

The development of adequate housing has been a long-standing issue in Cherbourg, heavily conditioned by the above history.

The first girls' dormitory building at Barambah was built in 1909 and a boys' dormitory was completed in 1910. The first dormitories at Barambah had no beds or mattresses and the children slept on the floor. Over time, the dormitory system at Barambah was expanded to include older girls and mothers with young children. By the 1920s, the Barambah dormitories were overcrowded. ... The establishment of a saw mill at Barambah around 1919 facilitated the construction of cottages for Aboriginal families and new school and hospital buildings during the 1920s. ... The dormitory system was gradually phased out at Cherbourg in the late 1970s.⁶

In the 1970s a factory to build pre-fabricated houses was established in Cherbourg. A total of 18 houses were made and sent to other Aboriginal communities. In 2003 the quality of housing was seen as variable and inadequate.



New social housing in Cherbourg

Housing in Cherbourg traverses spectra of age, size and complexity; older, small simple brick or fibro structures to more recently built large Queensland-style homesteads. While the newer homes are being built many older ones are still occupied but falling into disrepair. There is a considerable waiting list for new homes. The newer areas being developed are located on the hill

behind the hospital — ‘Snob Hill’ as it is referred to by the locals. Many of the older houses have broken windows and doors, and little in the way of furniture.⁷

Today housing is managed by the community through the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council and is only available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and individuals, with non-Indigenous carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children also eligible. In Queensland Indigenous social housing programs are in place for 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, encompassing 34 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, involving the construction of new houses, an annual upgrade program and provision of maintenance to improve housing.⁸

In recent years community housing programs in Cherbourg have been funded from the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA). Data provided by Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) indicates that in Cherbourg from 1 July 2008, 49 new dwellings have been completed at a cost of just over \$18 million, four Safe Haven dwellings have been constructed at a cost of \$1.59 million, and a 28 Lot subdivision developed at a cost of \$2.4 million. In



The Ration Shed, Cherbourg

addition, ten new dwellings are proposed and currently budgeted for at \$3.5 million. Maintenance and capital upgrade programs are delivered every year as part of the asset management regime. In 2016–17, \$2.0 million was spent on maintenance, and \$2.1 million was spent on capital upgrades of existing dwellings. A manager from Council summed up the impact of enhanced housing in the following terms:

When I first started they built the same sort of houses and then Council started to give people options about number of bedrooms and types of construction materials. People developed a stronger sense of belonging as they were given more involvement and choice in their home.

A strategic future-focused approach to housing associated infrastructure has been adopted, with reticulation being

developed to handle double the number of existing houses in Cherbourg. The focus on reticulation includes new or enhanced water treatment plants, dam infrastructure, sewer pump stations, sewerage and water reticulation mains and stormwater systems. These enhancements are designed to allow for future housing to reduce overcrowding and to accommodate expected future population growth.

An employment strategy for residents has been implemented as part of the community housing strategy with Individual Employment Opportunity Plans incorporated into housing construction contracts.

In addition to the above during 2015–2016 Council refurbished a derelict building to become the Winifred Fisher Indigenous Knowledge Centre, upgraded 12 homes, and improved its attendance and repair rates and quality in housing maintenance.⁹ (Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, 2016). Council has also employed a dedicated Housing Officer and a Rents Officer to assist the community obtain and maintain their tenancies.

The steady investment in housing that has occurred into Cherbourg over this period is seen by Council to be very

Table 1. Overcrowding in Cherbourg

Overcrowding status	Cherbourg ILOC				Queensland			
	Households with Indigenous persons		Non-Indigenous households		Households with Indigenous persons		Non-Indigenous households	
	number	%	number	%	number	%	number	%
Overcrowded:								
4 or more extra bedrooms needed	5	1.8	0	—	314	0.4	547	0.0
3 extra bedrooms needed	7	2.5	0	—	438	0.6	1,428	0.1
2 extra bedrooms needed	16	5.7	0	—	1,525	2.1	6,163	0.4
1 extra bedroom needed	44	15.6	0	—	5,317	7.4	32,956	2.1
Total overcrowded	81	28.7	0	—	7,592	10.5	41,094	2.7
Not overcrowded								
	203	72.0	0	—	61,368	85.1	1,447,547	93.7
Total	282	100	0	—	72,120	100	1,544,844	100

Source: Queensland Government, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (2017)

positive. Key to sustaining this progress has been three key factors, additional appropriate housing, positive relationships, and social and health support. Of critical importance has been the funding which has flowed through NAHA and the Queensland Government for construction and maintenance of housing stock together with future proofed infrastructure. Second has been the building and maintaining of purposeful and communicative relationships between the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council, the community, the Department (DHPW), and their representatives.

Particularly important in terms of frequency of contact is the Council relationship with the Building and Asset Services (BAS) section of the Department. BAS has direct contact with the community around maintenance and refurbishment and inspects 100 of the 300 houses in the community each year, meaning each house is inspected and assessed every three years. The purpose of the inspections is to identify where repairs, upgrades or modifications are required. The third factor seen as critical is the sustained and across agency attention to the social and health challenges faced by people associated with their housing and risk of homelessness. A wide range of social services operate in Cherbourg and numbers of these have direct relevance for housing and homelessness. As well as experiencing reduced stress and improved well-being, feedback from local services and residents to Council is that people also enjoy a range of health and social benefits due to enhanced housing, such as reductions in communicable diseases and domestic violence.

Challenges in Meeting Housing Needs

Challenges remain, reflected in census social and health statistics. Homelessness in Cherbourg includes a mix of overcrowding, staying at other people's places, and rough sleeping, and anecdotally services indicate the levels of homelessness continues to be problematic and could be rising.

Overcrowding has been a feature of Cherbourg life for the last century and remains a key challenge for Cherbourg. Table 1 indicates that more than a quarter of all households (28.7 per cent) in Cherbourg continue

to experience overcrowding, higher than rates in other Indigenous households in Queensland (10.5 per cent) and more than 10 times higher than the rate of non-Indigenous households in Queensland.

In Cherbourg it is not unusual for two or three families, each with many children, to live together. These living arrangements contribute significantly to associated social challenges of domestic violence, mental health issues, safety concerns (as people remove themselves from their home), and health issues related to reduced hygiene and the transmission of infections.

Reducing the density of housing occupancy, requires a combination of additional housing stock and improved ways of matching resident families and individuals to available stock. Housing development and matching also needs to be undertaken in ways that appreciate both continuities and changes taking place in traditional family structures.

Changes occurring over time include more young people wanting to live independently, young couples wanting to reside together, and a resultant need for additional one and two bedroom units. One continuity driving the need for three and four bedroom homes is the need to be responsive to Indigenous kinship. The official number of people residing in Cherbourg is almost certainly an underestimation of the actual number living there. Transience is common, with people regularly arriving in Cherbourg to spend time with kin, and cultural tradition meaning kin are welcomed into homes. Challenges regarding who to include on the housing wait list, and whether to include extended family who have come from other areas, have been the subject of debate within Council.

Housing development and maintenance needs to occur in parallel to attending to a range of strategies to enhance social and health outcomes in the community. Strategies being developed include an additional domestic violence response linked to enhanced allied health inter-agency communication to support early intervention, specific interventions to assist men to recognise and address what triggers

their violence, and development of a suicide prevention strategy.

Our past has been written for us, but our future is in our own hands entirely. Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire has faced many complications and hardships in the past, but the one thing that cannot be broken is our resilience and determination to move forward and strengthen our Community. This last year has been filled with successful initiatives to preserve our history, culture and community. Our future is moving full-steam ahead to improving our resources, developing our infrastructure, sharing our culture and making Cherbourg a safe, sustainable, strong and inspiring place to live.¹⁰

* Phil Crane is Associate Professor of Social Work, University of the Sunshine Coast

Sean Nicholson is Economic and Community Development Manager, Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council

Endnotes

1. Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council 2016, *Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council Annual Report 2015–2016*.
2. Ration Shed Museum, 'About Cherbourg' accessed at <http://rationshed.com.au/about-cherbourg/>
3. Queensland State Library 2017, *Community and Personal Histories Removals Database*, Queensland Government, Brisbane.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, Catalogue 3309.0 *Suicides Australia*, 2010, from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3309.0>
5. Queensland Government, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships 2017, accessed at <https://www.datsip.qld.gov.au/publications-governance-resources/justice-resources/cherbourg>
6. Queensland Government, *Community histories — Cherbourg 2017*, accessed at <https://www.qld.gov.au/atsi/cultural-awareness-heritage-arts/community-histories-cherbourg>
7. Bambrick H 2003, *Child growth and Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in a Queensland Aboriginal Community*, PhD. Thesis, Australian National University, Chapter 4: Landscapes and legacies: Cherbourg past to present, accessed at <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/46071/31/05chapter4.pdf>, p.115.
8. Department of Housing and Public Works, *Indigenous Housing Programs*, accessed at: <http://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/Housing/SocialHousing/CommunityHousing/Indigenous%20Housing%20Programs/Pages/default.aspx>
9. Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council 2016, op cit.
10. *ibid*, p.20.

Aboriginal Sociality and Kinship in West End Street Life

Paul Memmott and Alex Bond, Aboriginal Environments Research Centre, University of Queensland

Introduction

This article was written by Paul Memmott, a white anthropologist with a longstanding social science approach to the study of Indigenous homelessness and Alex Bond, a Kabi Kabi scholar of Aboriginal culture and history in South-east Queensland.

Whilst Memmott is an expert witness on Native Title and the Director of the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre at the University of Queensland (UQ), Bond is a casual tutor of Aboriginal culture in the same Centre and conducts guided tours of the Aboriginal cultural landscape in the Brisbane CBD for UQ students.

However, whereas Memmott resides as a home owner in West End on a comfortable professorial salary, Bond subsists (without welfare benefits) on minimal income that he largely raises by busking, and is himself technically

homeless by mainstream definitions, despite having a profound groundedness in the street culture milieu of inner Brisbane. Our collegial relationship, diverse backgrounds and our separate residential histories, albeit both living in West End since the mid-1970s, puts us in a special position to write on the sociality of the homeless blacks in West End.

History of Aboriginal People in West End

Elsewhere Memmott and another AERC colleague Kelly Greenop have written a chapter about the history of Aboriginal people at West End,¹ as has another colleague, Michael Aird in his book 'Brisbane Blacks'.² The Greenop and Memmott explore the impact of the 1898 Aboriginals Act which enabled the appointed Aboriginal Protectors to remove people from the city and send them to closed institutional settlements

such as Barambah (later called Cherbourg), Myora (on Stradbroke Island) and Deebing Creek (near Ipswich); but which simultaneously allowed Aboriginal labourers to be brought back from those places to the city when required.

Within this to-and-forth movement, Musgrave Park evolved as a weekend meeting and socialising point. When exemption status was incorporated into the Aboriginal Acts, some Aboriginal families rented houses or flats in West End. Michael Aird's interviews tell of the Aboriginal beats around the West End involving movements between river fishing and crabbing spots, various parks, hotels and sports venues and also across the river to the Boathouse in William Street for dancing.

Musgrave Park was also used as a meeting place by key regional Elders who were trying to keep Aboriginal culture and Law active, albeit in restricted ways due to the suppression of the Act (people such as Willie McKenzie, Charlie Moreton, Janie Sunflower; and after them, Penny Bond, Bowman Johnson and Janie Arnold). After the abolition of the Act in 1983, the links of the Aboriginal people in West End to Cherbourg remained as an important part of their identity. Musgrave Park increasingly became a symbolic site of Aboriginal protest, a site of resistance, but also of persistence of identity values.^{3, 4, 5}

In 1990–91, Memmott worked as a consultant to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal and Islander Deaths in Custody (DIC)⁶ His account describes how five of the six DIC victims in Brisbane lived in an impoverished alcoholic manner with much of their drinking and socialising focused in Musgrave Park.⁷



Co-author Alex Bond in central West End conducting a tour of Aboriginal places and settings for University of Queensland Masters students.

Memcott was able to establish from Aboriginal consultants that the Cherbourg people had 'defined a territorial niche in Musgrave Park into which outsiders sought permission to enter',⁸ albeit this conclusion was without careful field interviews.

Memcott wrote in 1991:

Research knowledge is poor concerning this [S.E.Q.] region. In Brisbane, social organisation is characterised by multiple overlapping kin-based communities located in numerous suburbs and largely formed by immigration in recent decades. They are further characterised by high internal transformation as members move across the city or return to home communities in many parts of the State. New arrivals to such communities at first build on kinship and home town links, but some communities also form around a range of types of other social bonds such as affiliation to sports clubs, government and community organisations, [and] Aboriginal residential locales [West End, Inala]. Group membership may also be dictated by lifestyle circumstances, for example, as in the case of alcoholic, low-income, street groups (the 'drones'). More permanent features of Brisbane social organisation may be stable matrifocal families with long-term residential links (most members of the original tribal groups appear to have disappeared) It is clear that a high proportion of the Brisbane population, including the street groups, are from Cherbourg. It is argued that these people represent the legacy of the State's institutional policies at Cherbourg which have resulted in community fracturing and dispersal rather than social cohesion based on a desired quality of lifestyle.⁹

However, as we shall see, in 1991, Memcott underestimated the strength of the Cherbourg social bonds.

In July 2017, Alex Bond was able to provide Paul Memcott with the kinship links and structure to draw up a genealogy which incorporated most of the West End street people with whom he was in regular contact at that time, and connect them through some four ascending generations to a genealogy previously prepared in Cherbourg.

Street Life in West End (Alex talking here.)

Reflecting on Street life in West End, I know a lot of fringe-dwellers, who are on the fringe of different social groups; that's the common thing amongst them.

Fortitude Valley is similar but a bit different. There is a particular type of culture in West End. There is more understanding by shop owners from the small businessman to the big ones. Those that have been there up to 50 years... understanding of those on the social/economic fringe.

West End also has an influx of travellers (from places like Nimbin, Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, etc.). They pull in for a night or a week; maybe in a van or hitch-hiking. All different cultures can be found in West End: Irish, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, USA, European extraction — an eclectic mix of people. All that makes it a glue; it makes it more bearable ... that understanding; to exist on this planet. But some can't last it; some may leave. They have different issues: drugs, too much drinking, mental health issues. Always a flow of people, but always those who have been there all the time, who decided to stay after they had travelled and travelled to and fro; they felt more welcome in West End. Like people from Rocky, where it's a frontier town; but a more accepting environment in West End. They get that feeling and like it here; they want to stay. But 95 per cent of them have issues. They were once all deep and meaningful humans as children, but then 'shit' went down. They had too hard a life and they never came back to normality.

All these people get money from Centrelink, although there might be the odd one who does work. They get their cheques on different days. That's how they work it. Might be four who team up, to pool money. They've got to team up to buy grog and drugs. Ice is a big problem too; one in four might be on ice. In Musgrave Park, they sit there and drink; might be a bit of gunja smoked. But if they want to take ice they go somewhere else — too much to tolerate, too agro, on another level. It's hard work dealing with them socially when

they're on ice. Then they all go to the street vans for free food.

They are homeless, but most have got some sort of place to stay. Some might pay to sleep on a couch; might pay \$50 or \$100 a week: stay with a cousin, auntie or nephew. Some don't pay anything, and may stay under a bridge (William Jolly Bridge, Railway Bridge, or the Go-Between Bridge). There might be five or six bridge sleepers sometimes, even ten. The Police don't hassle them too much if no trouble. Many have got a bad record with the Department of Housing, so can't go there; they've stuffed up in the past. We need a few places like at Bribie Island, or in the hinterland, to take these people to; they need that space thing, some grounding, where it's a safer place in the bush.

There are a lot of Cherbourg people in West End: 95 per cent who gather in Musgrave Park are Cherbourg connected, although they could come from Inala too. This continuity is still going; my Kabi Kabi people are coming to Brisbane. The Aboriginal people are all connected; even if they want to be apart, they can't be. Even if they're from interstate, it's the same. They have got to slot in to the social group network. You can have different crews in the Park, they don't all mass together. They may be all from Cherbourg, but they'll have their circles. But still here we are all 'Musgrave Park mob' as opposed to 'Valley mob'. Always this geographical thing. I've tried to break this down, even though both mobs are from Cherbourg. There is a culture of being separate (two sets of attachments). I try to make a joke of it when I mix with the Valley mob. I try to gloss over it with humour. But it's there.

Alex is steeped in this Kabi history (Paul talking now) and he daily makes reference to the network of people in his mental kinship structure, reminding people on the street how they are related to one another even if it means tracing back four or five generations to the 1800s. As an analytic exercise, the authors made a spreadsheet of some 22 people with whom Alex socialised on the streets of West End during July 2017: 16 were Aboriginal, four white and two Polynesian. We then sorted them into

Paul's Indigenous homelessness categories (see table). Most of the 22 were in the 'Housed but at Risk' category: 13 resided in hostels or boarding houses, two were couch surfers albeit within a relatively stable pattern, two were best described as in the 'dysfunctionally mobile' category taking whatever nightly option was available and being expected to move on.

Of the remaining, two were 'rough sleepers' ('public-place dwellers' category) and two (both white) were flat tenants but with irregular tenancy periods. One of the latter tenants had up to six people sleeping on the floor of his flat at night.

Various Aboriginal 'at-risk' street people were residing in either of the two Aboriginal hostels in West End (three cooked meals at fixed times, some rooms with ensuites, others without), or in either of the several Aboriginal boarding houses (rent individual rooms, shared ablution facilities). On the other hand, non-Indigenous 'at risk' people were often at a Boarding House off Boundary Street, but this nevertheless was a venue often visited by Aboriginal street friends for social get-togethers. A small number of the Indigenous people also reside in Micah's Common Ground building.

Were any of these West End street people in the third spiritual homelessness category? Memmott has defined spiritual homelessness in a particular way as:

'a state arising from separation from traditional land and/or separation from family and kinship networks (often a result of past government

*policies) and involving an identity crisis based on a lack of relation to country and family, or confusion over how they relate to country and family with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity systems. Such feelings add to the already depressed emotional state of public-place dwellers or those at risk of homelessness.'*¹¹

Bond has amplified spiritual homelessness in West End as follows:

'All my mob has got it — but only 10 to 15 per cent feel it, they suffer more. Others are ignorant of it. It means I can't go to my homeland and live there as someone who has spiritual connections. What contributes to it, is modern Aboriginal politics, especially Native Title, — that tears the spiritual aspect apart.'

Conclusion

Street life of Aboriginal people in West End does involve all of the technical categories of Aboriginal homelessness as described by Memmott et al,¹² ranging from 'rough sleeping' to the various forms of secondary (or at risk of losing housing) homelessness and spiritual homelessness. However, a set of values held by a core of Kabi Kabi and Waka Waka peoples and revolving around a common denominator of shared descent and kinship derived from Cherbourg and preceded by settlement at Manambar and Durundur, acts as a form of historically-transmitted social capital upon which Aboriginal street people depend for daily getting by, with some sense of shared cultural identity, dignity and pride in what is nevertheless a hard street lifestyle in modern-day Brisbane.

There is a saying in Cherbourg (Alex speaking):

'You can go to many places, many towns and States, but you will always find a Cherbourg person; Cherbourg people travel well. Some are crazy but all are resilient.'

Endnotes

1. Greenop K and Memmott P 2013, Aboriginal identity and place in the intercultural settings of metropolitan Australia in Peter E and Andersen C (eds) *Indigenous in the City: Contemporary Identities and Cultural Innovation*, UBC Press, Vancouver, pp. 256–281.
2. Aird M 2001, *Brisbane Blacks*, Keeaira Press, Southport, Queensland.
3. Huggins J and Huggins R 1994, *Auntie Rita*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, p.78.
4. Aird M 2001, op cit, p.33.
5. Greenop K and Memmott P 2013, op cit, pp.226–23.
6. Memmott P 1991, Queensland Aboriginal Cultures and the Deaths in Custody victims, in Wyvell, L., Commissioner, *Regional Report of Inquiry in Queensland, Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody*, Australian Government Printer Canberra, Appendix 2, pp. 171–289.
7. *ibid*, pp.262–263.
8. *ibid*, p.262.
9. *ibid*, pp.261–262.
10. Memmott P, Long S, Chambers C and Spring F 2003, *Final Report: Categories of Indigenous 'Homeless' People and Good Practice Responses to Their Needs*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Queensland Research Centre, St Lucia. https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2113/AHURI_Final_Report_No49_Categories_of_Indigenous_homeless_people_and_good_practice_responses.pdf (viewed 5/10/17).
11. Memmott P and Nash D 2014, Indigenous homelessness, in Chamberlain C, Johnson G and Robinson C (Eds) *Homelessness in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, pp.155–178.
12. Memmott P, Long S, Chambers C and Spring F 2003, op cit.

Table: Categories of Indigenous public-place dwelling and homelessness¹⁰

Category A Public-place dwellers	Category B Housed people 'at risk'	Category C Spiritually homeless
A1 Voluntary, short-term	B1 Insecurely housed	C1 Separated from traditional land/family/kinship networks
A2 Voluntary, medium term	B2 Sub-standard housing	
A3 Voluntary/involuntary, long-term	B3 Crowded-housing	C2 Confusion/lack of knowledge about relationship to country/ family
A4 Involuntary	B4 Dysfunctionally mobile	

Creating Brighter Futures: The Role of Youth Foyers in Providing Pathways to Independence for Young Vulnerable Queenslanders

Department of Housing and Public Works

Youth Homelessness: The Queensland Context

Access to safe, secure and affordable housing, and support to develop skills to sustain housing, continues to be a major challenge for young Australians. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in 2017, 43,165 young people aged 15 to 24, approached a specialist homelessness service alone in Australia in 2015–16, of which 5,225 were living in Queensland. Most of these young people were assisted by specialist homelessness services that provided more traditional, temporary, supported accommodation responses, which have achieved mixed outcomes for young people.

Data and research shows that there is a range of structural and individual risk factors that make young people vulnerable to homelessness.¹ It suggests that young people do not become homeless by choice, and the causes of homelessness are often complex and varied.

Unemployment, financial issues, poverty, previous experiences of abuse and/or neglect, substance misuse, mental health and family violence are just some of the issues young people experience that increases their vulnerability to homelessness. The extensive research also shows the harmful effects that homelessness has on the social, emotional and physical development of young people.

As noted throughout the literature, homelessness is one of the most severe forms of disadvantage and social exclusion and can have enduring effects on young people. It creates difficulties in all areas of life including attending school, engaging in further education or training, or securing employment. The personal and community costs of youth

homelessness are very high, with the total cost to the Australian economy of additional health and justice services estimated as \$747 million in 2015. This exceeded the total cost \$619 million, of providing specialist homelessness services to the 256,000 people (young and old) during the same period.² This evidence supports the investment in housing options for young people.

Improving housing outcomes for young people experiencing homeless, or at risk of experiencing homelessness, is a high priority for the Queensland Government. The *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* (the strategy) and the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2020 Action Plan*, have a strong focus on the housing needs of young people, through the development of two new youth foyers on the Gold Coast and in Townsville, and the expansion of the Logan Youth Foyer.

The Youth Foyer Model

The youth foyer model is internationally recognised for providing secure and affordable housing while also delivering social and economic benefits for young people and the community. The Foyer Federation of Australia describes foyers as ‘learning and student accommodation centres for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless’. They are designed for young people, with the capacity to engage in education and training, but who are prevented from participating due to structural, institutional or personal barriers.

Foyers provide person-centred around the clock, on-site support services that deliver case management support to tenants to achieve education, training and/or employment outcomes. They also assist young people to develop the life skills necessary to maintain secure housing when they exit. These

important service delivery elements are central to the design and implementation of the new and expanded youth foyers in Queensland.

While youth foyers are a relatively new approach to preventing youth homelessness in Queensland, there has been considerable success achieved throughout their delivery across Australia and internationally. Australian foyers were first established in 2001, at Miller Live ‘N’ Learn in Western Sydney and Southern Youth and Family Services in Wollongong. A key characteristic of Australian youth foyers is the strength of the link between them, and education establishments, with some foyers established on campuses alongside other student accommodation — for example, the Education First Youth Foyer, Holmes Glen TAFE and Waverley Campus.

Analysis of foyer, and foyer-like youth housing models undertaken by Swinburne University in 2013, identified that Australian foyers were highly successful at moving young people onto stable and secure long-term housing. Over 80 per cent of former residents secured housing, while only six per cent exited prematurely due to disputes or behavioural issues.³ The Swinburne University study also found that over 50 per cent of former foyer residents remained engaged in some form of education or training after exiting and surmised that a considerable number may have entered the workforce. However, no firm data was available for this assertion.

The Queensland Experience

Queensland’s first youth foyer at Logan opened in 2009 and provides 22 units of housing for young people. It is jointly operated through a partnership model between Horizon

Housing Company, who delivers the property and tenancy management services, and Wesley Mission Queensland who delivers the on-site support services. Testimony from tenants demonstrates the value the facility has played in helping young people build confidence and life skills:

Kate

'It's awesome to live at the foyer... it's given me a lot of encouragement and confidence...'

Jai

'Foyer feels like a family... you have people who are supporting you every day.'

Lui

*'Support is key to get young people into the adult world.'*⁴

The Logan Youth Foyer has operated at or near capacity since it opened and the Department of Housing and Public Works (the department) anticipates that future demand for the enhanced service will be equally high.

The commitment to expand the youth foyer model in Queensland is one of a suite of responses the Queensland Government is implementing to address youth homelessness. The new investment in youth foyers will provide young people, aged between 16 and 25, with an opportunity to live independently, while receiving the necessary assistance to become confident, strong and self-supporting. Once complete, the three youth foyers will jointly provide contemporary housing services to 120 young Queenslanders.

Maximising Every Opportunity

The strategy aims to engage with, and build capacity of vulnerable young people, by placing them at the center of the planning and design phases for the Queensland foyers. Existing tenants from the Logan Youth Foyer recently participated in a design workshop.

First workshop



**Logan Youth Foyer expansion
Garfield Road, Woodridge**



Their views and experiences of homelessness, and the support they've received, are vital to improving the functionality of the current service and guiding the direction of the new foyers. Similar events will be held during the Gold Coast and Townsville foyers development process, which are expected to be fully operational in early 2019.

The Queensland Government is encouraging the adoption of best practice responses among the organisations that will provide specialist homelessness services at the new foyers. We envisage our new approach will significantly contribute to the continued development of the foyer movement in Australia.

Investing in these new foyers has the potential to create a paradigm shift from investing almost exclusively in temporary supported accommodation responses, to investing in initiatives such as youth foyers. The introduction of the youth foyers has the ability to improve the housing and homelessness service systems in Townsville, Logan and the Gold Coast, by complementing existing, immediate youth homelessness responses. These three locations were chosen based on the high levels of need for housing responses to vulnerable young people. Our investment aims to ensure service delivery approaches provide the maximum opportunity for young people to receive support to achieve a pathway to independence.

Youth foyers provide quality, self-contained accommodation, with

on-site person-centred support, support that allows young people to develop skills, capabilities and confidence which can decisively break the cycle of homelessness. They provide a valuable opportunity and environment for young people to learn and practice what it means to be a good tenant and neighbour. Typically, young people remain in a youth foyer for up to 18 months, but can stay longer if required. During their stay, the

foundations for transition to independent and sustainable futures are laid.

It is acknowledged that youth foyers will not be the housing and homelessness solution for all vulnerable young people, but the commitment to establish new foyers will greatly improve the housing, education and employment outcomes for many vulnerable young Queenslanders. The department looks forward to partnering with other government agencies, and non-government organisations and local communities, to deliver and implement this important initiative.

Endnotes

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017 *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Specialist Homelessness Services Collection 2015–16: Queensland Supplementary Tables* Canberra, ACT, Australian Government: retrieved from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness-specialist-homelessness-services-2015-16/supplementary-tables>.
- Chamberlain C and Mackenzie D 2006, 'Homeless careers: A framework for intervention', *Australian Social Work*, vol.59, no.2, pp.32–38.
- Johnson G, Gronda H and Coutts S 2008, *On the Outside: Pathways in and out of homelessness*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne.
2. MacKenzie D, Flatau P, Steen A and Thielking M 2016, *The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study*, Melbourne: Swinburne Institute of Social Research p.2.
3. Steen A and MacKenzie D 2013, *Financial Analysis of Foyer and Foyer Like Youth Housing Models*, Swinburne University, Melbourne, p.46.
4. Not the resident's real names.

Youth to Work: Opportunities to Break the Cycle of Intergenerational Dependency

The Department of Housing and Public Works

The Queensland Government is looking at ways of breaking the cycle of intergenerational welfare dependency by ensuring the public housing system encourages young people to engage in education, training or employment when they finish school.

Intergenerational welfare dependency has a significant impact on communities, families and children. It can set young people on a trajectory of future homelessness and social exclusion, restricting their opportunities to engage in education and work experience. This can make it more difficult to gain the employment that is essential to support future access to rental housing and ultimately home ownership.

People aged under 25 years living in public housing, deserve the same opportunities as all young Queenslanders. Through the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027* (the Strategy), the Queensland Government is supporting children and dependents

of public housing tenants to remain at home while they engage in education, training or employment, so they can achieve their aspirations and dreams, without barriers.

Previously, if you were a young person trying to get a job and help yourself into financial independence — your moving into work would impact the household rent calculation — making it go up after a period of at least six months and potentially impacting the household's ongoing eligibility for public housing. This was not fair and did not help children and dependents of tenants into long-term work or create pathways out of public housing. The Queensland Government is working to turn this around. In 2016, Centrelink supplements to assist young people take up training and study opportunities were made non-assessable for rent purposes, and this year the Government will implement the Youth to Work initiative.

The Youth to Work initiative will support residents under 25 years old in public housing to pursue and

sustain employment by allowing them to have their working income excluded from their household's rent calculation processes. This will allow children and dependents of tenants to contribute to their family's living costs, encourage them to start saving for their own future housing needs and open up new opportunities through active workforce participation. They will also be offered housing assistance towards independence, including loans and financial assistance.

The Strategy is a ten year framework driving key reforms and targeted investment across the housing continuum, providing pathways for people into independent accommodation wherever possible, whether that be new affordable housing, the private rental market or home ownership. This person-centred approach creates housing pathways that will enable prosperity, create connections and instil confidence, providing every Queenslanders with the opportunity to fully participate in social and economic life and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The Mayes Place Tenant Hub

The Department of Housing and Public Works is supporting local responses that make a difference for young people living in public housing. The Mayes Place Tenant Hub (the Hub) in Logan supports place-based service delivery which aims to improve tenants' health and well-being and create opportunities for them to connect with their local community. Almost half of the 153 residents are under the age of 25, with some of these young people having families of their own.

The Hub's focus on service outreach, engagement with tenants and residents, maintenance and security improvements and collaboration with local community agencies is supporting tenants and their families to access opportunities to achieve greater economic, social and cultural participation.

The Hub has commenced over 40 different activities, linked with 15 local community agencies, including employment and training

events, a street library, an edible garden and a Wheel of Wellness program. An employment and training program, run by YFS, connects tenants to volunteering, barista training and numeracy, literacy and computer skills, as first steps to obtaining paid work.

The Hub's operation will be reviewed after 12 months to determine the impact and outcomes this program generates for the young people participating in it.

Social Bonds for Youth Homelessness

The Queensland Treasury

The Queensland Government has contracted with Churches of Christ in Queensland to address youth homelessness through the Youth CONNECT Social Benefit Bond (SBB). An SBB (or SIB: social impact bond) is an innovative approach to resolve intractable social problems, involving government, non-government organisations, and private sector investors. At the time of writing, Social Finance reports that 89 social impact bonds have launched internationally, with a further 70 in development.¹

Youth CONNECT aims to support young people aged 15 to 25 years who are exiting or have exited statutory care and are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Throughout the program, clients will have access to suitable accommodation and be encouraged to pursue educational, employment, and personal development opportunities.

Context

Youth homelessness is a complex issue, and demands a multifaceted response. In 2015–16, 8,711 clients aged 15 to 24 years were provided specialist homelessness services in Queensland.³ Of young people exiting statutory out-of-home care in Australia, around one in four experience homelessness.⁴

The Youth CONNECT SBB complements and expands upon the existing provision of housing and homelessness services in Queensland, including, for example, Youth Foyers, and supports the objective of the Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027 that ‘every Queenslanders has access to a safe, secure and affordable home that meets their needs and enables participation in the social and economic life of our prosperous state.’⁵

In practice, Youth CONNECT is expected to assist vulnerable young Queenslanders identify suitable pathways to independence while embracing education and training opportunities. Importantly, the SBB enables a person-centred response to addressing youth homelessness. Underlying Youth CONNECT is a ‘housing first’ approach which Churches of Christ in Queensland notes ‘gives people the safety and security of a home, providing the stable base they need to address other aspects of their lives.’⁶

During the six and a half year program (commencing in 2017),

around 300 young people are expected to participate in the program, across South-East Queensland and Townsville. The Department of Housing and Public Works will coordinate referrals into the program, which fall into one of two cohorts:

- young people aged 15 to 18 years exiting the child protection system who have had four or more placements
- young people aged 15 to 25 years exiting the youth justice system, adult corrections system, or in contact with homelessness services, and who have past experience with the child protection system.



Figure 1: Cohort identification

The selection of these cohorts is intentional (see Figure 1). Two-thirds of homeless young people have prior placement in out-of-home care.⁷ Moreover, young people accessing specialist homelessness services and child protection services are more likely to have mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues, and/or be experiencing domestic and family violence.⁸ Similarly, young people who have also been under a youth justice supervision are more likely to need assistance with social/behavioural problems, and be most likely to experience multiple episodes of homelessness.

Investment Mechanism

The Youth CONNECT SBB represents a Payment by Outcomes (PbO) arrangement, whereby the Queensland Government provides funding to Churches of Christ in Queensland upon achievement of measured and verified outcomes. Youth CONNECT relies on upfront funding of \$5 million through the issuance of a social benefit bond to external investors, who will receive a financial return and capital repayment contingent on the program demonstrating success. The Queensland Government is not responsible for the issue of any financial products issued in connection with this program nor for any investment in them.

For Youth CONNECT, success is defined by a client maintaining housing stability and participating in a combination of education, employment, and personal development activities.

The introduction of payments conditional on performance is a key to incentivising effective service delivery and driving social change. Higher performance means higher payments, and lower performance means lower payments. The SBB investment mechanism — one form of impact investment — is emerging internationally as a new approach to addressing complex social issues, as it encourages innovation in service delivery and taps into a broad private capital market. In Australia, in the area of homelessness, the NSW Government has announced the Foyer51 SBB and the Government of South Australia, the Aspire SIB.

A general consensus has arisen across the domestic and international impact investment community that there is extensive capital 'on the table' but a lack of investment opportunities. In this way, the Queensland Government's Social Benefit Bonds Pilot Program has impacted the local market. Even so, SBBs may not suit all types of services or organisations and consideration is needed as to whether this specific investment tool is the right one under particular circumstances.

Social Benefit Bonds Pilot Program

The Youth CONNECT SBB is one of three SBBs delivered by the Queensland Government, through Queensland Treasury's Social Benefit Bonds Pilot Program. The other SBBs — Newpin QLD and Youth Choices — focus on issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and youth reoffending, respectively. For Newpin, the primary outcome sought is the safe reunification of children who are living in out-of-home care to their families. In Queensland, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are nine times more likely to be subject to protective orders than non-Indigenous children. For Youth Choices, the primary outcome sought is a reduction in reoffending behaviour of young offenders aged 10 to 16 years.

The pilot program was announced in the 2015–16 State Budget, intended to enhance the current service offering and deliver broad social benefits to the community. The Queensland Government initiated an intensive procurement process in late 2015, including market sounding events, expressions of interest, requests for proposal, and a joint development phase for each of three

proposals. The signing of the Youth CONNECT SBB in June 2017 marked the contracting of the third SBB, following the signing of the Newpin Queensland and Youth Choices SBBs in March 2017 and May 2017, respectively.

The market sounding process (June to November 2017) signalled the Queensland Government's commitment to extensive stakeholder engagement throughout the procurement process. Engagement activities ranged from individual face-to-face meetings with government agencies, non-government organisations, peak bodies, financial service providers and other jurisdictions, to an inclusive open-invitation market sounding discussion forum (there were 85 attendees representing 43 different organisations). These interactions were essential in gauging market interest and expectations, defining and refining social problems suitable for an SBB-funded intervention, and fostering positive working relationships between (traditionally) disparate groups (e.g., service providers and potential investors). From these sessions, respondents expressed the strongest interest in a homelessness bond.

During the formal procurement process of each bond (from original tender submission to contract execution), the role of the Queensland Government was not to prescribe a service, but rather to understand the efficacy of the service in achieving the desired outcomes (applying a Theory of Change logic), and to negotiate purposeful outcome metrics on which payments would be made. With a singular focus on the outcome,



Figure 2: Youth CONNECT SBB



Lockhart river family

Photo provided by the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works

proponents were offered flexibility in deciding how to achieve the outcome. Unlike traditional procurement of social services, the pilot program demanded extensive rigour in problem identification and outcomes definition and measurement. Accordingly, a deliberate shift in the 'payment point' from activities and outputs to outcomes challenged service providers, government agencies, and investors alike.

For the Youth CONNECT SBB, the Queensland Government undertook extensive consultation with senior representatives of Churches of Christ in Queensland (service provider), and Social Outcomes and Westpac Banking Corporation (intermediaries) (see Figure 2).

While day-to-day service delivery responsibilities rest with a service provider, it does not mean that government remains passive. Noting the proposed cohort for the Youth CONNECT SBB, the Queensland

Government will actively refer clients across multiple government departments, and closely monitor performance of Youth CONNECT to deliver measurable positive outcomes for young people participating in the program. This accountability framework is common across all SBBs.

The finalisation of the Youth CONNECT SBB was borne out of a partnership between the Department of Housing and Public Works and Queensland Treasury, and reveals the value of working together across government to achieve positive outcomes for the community. Similar efforts were demonstrated for the Newpin QLD and Youth Choices SBB (involving various departments). The collaborative approach undertaken by the Queensland Treasury for all three SBBs was externally endorsed through the SBB Pilot Program receiving the 'Best Cross-Functional Teamwork Project' at the CIPS Australasia Conference and Supply Management Awards 2017.

Endnotes

1. Social Finance 2017, Impact Bond Global Database, <http://www.socialfinance.org.uk/database/>.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2015–16: Qld supplementary table CLIENTS.1*, Canberra.
3. Johnson G et al. 2010, *Pathways from out-of-home care, AHURI Final Report No. 147*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.
4. Department of Housing and Public Works 2017, *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*, Brisbane.
5. Churches of Christ in Queensland 2016, *Submission to Queensland Government's Housing Strategy*.
6. MacKenzie D et al 2016, *The Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia: Research Briefing*, <http://www.csi.edu.au/research/project/cost-youth-homelessness-australia-final-report/>.
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016, *Vulnerable young people: interactions across homelessness, youth justice and child protection — 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2015*, Cat no. HOU 279, Canberra.

Youth Homelessness in Queensland

Darren Young, Queensland and Northern Territory State Director, Mission Australia

Homelessness can be an isolating, destabilising and often traumatic experience. For children and young people, whose development is not yet complete, homelessness can be particularly devastating and its effects long lasting.

As an organisation focussed on reducing homelessness and strengthening communities, at Mission Australia we are passionate about preventing and addressing youth homelessness not only for the immediate consequences but also because we know that once a young person becomes homeless they are much more likely to experience homelessness again later in life.

With education disrupted and no stable home address, young people who become homeless have a greater likelihood of leaving school early and significantly higher unemployment rates than their peers. They lack social supports and are at an increased risk of mental illness. The personal and community costs of youth homelessness are unacceptably high.

At last count, there were more than 44,000 children and young people experiencing homelessness in Australia and census data due later

this year is likely to show that this has increased. However, the census data does not capture everyone. Many of the young people who are spending time away from home, often staying with family or friends 'couch surfing', would not be included and actual numbers are likely to be much higher.

Mission Australia's *Youth Homelessness Report* shows that up to one in seven young people in Queensland could be at risk of homelessness, which is in line with the national picture. Of the 4,109 young Queenslanders who responded to our *Youth Survey* in 2015, 13.6 per cent or 517 young people had spent time away from home in the last three years because they felt they could not go back.

Of these young people, around 85 per cent spent time away from home on more than one occasion, with around a quarter having spent time away from home more than ten times. Eight of these young people were away from home for longer than six months. These young people spending frequent and lengthy periods of time away from home because they felt unable to return may be at an increased risk of normalising their experiences away

from home and falling into more entrenched homelessness.

As expected, there are clear links between family relationships and the risk of a young person becoming homeless. Over half (52 per cent) of the young people who spent time away from home reported either a poor or fair relationship with their family, compared to just 13.8 per cent of young people who had never spent time away from home because they felt like they couldn't go back.

Our data also shows that young people who had to spend time away from home were much more likely to be concerned about family conflict, depression, coping with stress and suicide.

There are also clear links between mental illness and risks of homelessness for young people. The *Youth Mental Health and Homelessness Report* highlights that young people with a probable serious mental illness are three and a half times more likely to have spent time away from their home and nearly twice as likely to have spent time away from home on six or more occasions compared to their peers.

The link between homelessness and mental illness among young people works in both directions, as young people who are experiencing mental illness are at increased risk of homelessness, while those who are homeless are at increased risk of mental illness.

While there are significant problems that need to be addressed, the good news is that there are solutions that have proven to have an impact.

We have called on all governments to commit to halving youth

Young people with a probable serious mental illness are

3.5

times more likely to have spent

time away from home than those without a probable serious mental illness



Of the young people who spent time away from home

Nearly 1/2

of those with a probable serious mental illness had done so on six or more occasions





Photo provided by Mission Australia

homelessness by 2020 and the current negotiations on the National Housing and Homelessness Agreements are a great opportunity for the states and the Commonwealth to set clear targets for reducing homelessness.

In order to achieve this target we must act early and address the issues that lead to young people leaving home. We need to actively build strong family relationships, ensure schools are equipped to identify students who may be in need of support and provide targeted support and early intervention when it is needed. Addressing the risk-factors that lead to homelessness, including mental illness, can prevent a young person from having to experience homelessness.

In Toowoomba and on the Gold Coast, Mission Australia runs the Federally Funded Reconnect program. We work with young people and their families to reduce long-term risks of homelessness. To ensure early intervention, our Reconnect service on the Gold Coast has embedded itself in local schools to identify young people needing support before problems escalate. The service forms part of the schools' wellbeing team and also provides workshops for

students and parents in surrounding schools.

Reconnect has a strong focus on building and enhancing family relationships. Michael* was referred to Reconnect by his school Guidance Officer, who noticed he was struggling to make positive friendships with other students. Michael's parents had separated some time ago and that was having an impact. The program introduced Michael to new strategies to help him communicate with his parents, teachers and fellow students. He also took part in individual and group activities outside of school, such as walks, bike riding and ten-pin bowling, to help build his confidence in social settings. His parents were also supported in building better relationships with Michael and with the school.

Michael's relationships with his parents have improved and he continues to live with both parents week on week off. Importantly, Michael's self-confidence improved dramatically. He established positive friendships and approached his youth worker in person to inform that he was happy and felt that he no longer required support. Support from the youth workers was reduced from weekly to fortnightly meetings, then

ended when it was clear Michael was no longer in need of ongoing support.

Assisting young people to stay at home whenever possible is vital, however that will not be possible for everyone. Providing housing that is appropriate and affordable for young people is also necessary when it is not safe or appropriate for the young person to live with their family.

In addition to direct prevention and early intervention, we need increased investment in social and affordable housing and supported accommodation models for young people. When a young person has a safe and secure home, this provides a firm foundation from which they can grow and thrive. It allows them to build strong social relationships and to study, learn a trade or embark on their chosen career.

An increasingly common model of supported accommodation internationally and in Australia is the Youth Foyer approach. This model assists young people, usually aged between 16 and 24, to engage in education and employment and gradually to reduce their dependence on social services. Youth Foyers generally have self-contained accommodation, on-site support workers, education programs, variable levels of support where a young person can progress to more independent living, onsite facilities (for example health services) and social enterprises where young people who live there gain employment experience (such as a café). Participation in education, training and employment is a condition of the accommodation. In these ways and because of their focus on independence, Foyers are different from traditional supported accommodation models.¹ Youth Foyer models are yet to be fully evaluated in the Australian context but offer great prospects in helping young people transition to independence.

The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027 includes a commitment to build two new youth foyers on the Gold Coast and in Townsville, to provide housing for young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, and support them to achieve independence. This

is a welcome advancement in reducing youth homelessness. We are also pleased that the Strategy commits to young people in public housing having greater capacity to pursue education, training and employment opportunities and social and economic participation.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach that will work for every young person experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Supportive accommodation is also needed for the most marginalised young people who are not ready for the commitments of the Youth Foyer approach, particularly those with alcohol and drug problems, mental health issues and contact with the criminal justice system. These young people will need intensive case management supports, to respond to the trauma and hardship of their experiences.

With that in mind, we welcome the Queensland Housing Strategy commitment to improved access to safe and secure housing options for highly vulnerable young people exiting from out-of-home care and institutional settings, to support their transition to independence. There are already some good models in practice that could be expanded and replicated to meet this objective.

Out of Community Care in Cairns is a residential program operated by Mission Australia for young people aged 12 to 17 years with complex support needs. We care for up to 12 young people a year, with four in each house, and provide an environment



Photo provided by Mission Australia

that supports the young person in their adolescent development as an alternative to family based care. Our team of experienced workers provide care for 24 hours a day, every day of the year, and referrals to this program are through the Department of Child Safety's Placement Management Team.

We know young people who have experienced out of home care are at heightened risk of homelessness. Specialised programs such as this one can prevent homelessness when exiting care by providing more intensive supports to meet the young person's needs in a person-centred way. There may be many other issues to work through before the young people are ready to commit to a path of educational engagement or employment in a Foyer.

The Queensland Government's Housing Strategy takes some positive steps towards preventing and addressing homelessness for young people. However, there is still more that can be done at both the state and Commonwealth level to provide support services and housing to young people who need them.

While the States provide many of the services and programs required, the Commonwealth has many of the levers that could address housing affordability and provide some relief for young people at risk of homelessness due to financial pressures. Youth Allowance, Newstart and Commonwealth Rent Assistance need to be reviewed and raised to adequate levels so that young people can meet their housing costs and other basic costs of living.

It will take action at all levels of government to ensure that the one in seven young people at risk of homelessness are supported, safely housed and do not become entrenched in homelessness in later life. The current negotiations on the National Housing and Homelessness Agreements are the time for strong commitments by the Queensland and the Commonwealth government.

Endnote

1. O'Shaughnessy M 2015, *Somewhere to stay: models addressing youth homelessness*, accessed January 2016, https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/media/fellows/OShaughnessy_Molly_2014_Somewhere_to_stay.pdf



Photo provided by Mission Australia

Youth CONNECT: Building Resilience to Homelessness in Young People

Leanne Rutherford, General Manager, Children, Youth and Families, Churches of Christ in Queensland

Young people leaving statutory care and transitioning to independence are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in our society. This is evidenced through national and international research that concludes that this group are significantly more likely to experience housing instability or homelessness, be unemployed and earn lower wages, have poorer educational outcomes (including early school leaving), be involved in the criminal justice system, experience poor physical and mental health, and have issues with substance abuse.¹ While the high vulnerability of young care leavers is clearly documented and understood, the critical resources and supports needed to significantly

improve life outcomes and change the trajectory for this particular group of young people are historically limited and somewhat disjointed.

Churches of Christ in Queensland has contracted its first social benefit bond (SSB) with the Queensland Government. A Social Benefit Bond is an outcomes-based arrangement involving the government, private investors and a service provider.² Through this strategy, Churches of Christ in Queensland (CofCQ) will be delivering the Youth CONNECT program addressing the area of homelessness specifically for young people who have, or are, transitioning from statutory care. Westpac Banking Corporation (Westpac) has partnered

with Social Outcomes to support Churches of Christ in Queensland, by raising \$5 million from private investors to contribute to the Youth CONNECT program in Queensland over six and a half years.

The CofCQ Youth CONNECT program is the first social benefit bond in the world to tackle the issue of homelessness, experienced by a significant proportion of young people transitioning from statutory care to independence and adulthood. While they may face the prospect of many poor outcomes, there are also significant opportunities to intervene early and turn the course of their young lives around.³ Youth CONNECT will engage with young people and



Photo provided by Churches for Christ in Queensland

support them to build the capacity and resilience they need to create a stronger future for themselves and, in turn, help build a better future for the community as a whole.

By definition, resilient individuals are confident; they are better able to activate their own strengths and call on personal resources in times of stress or when faced with adversity and are less affected by negative influences.⁴ In the context of the Youth CONNECT program, resilience includes the measure of positive personal resources available within an individual to support the maintenance of safe and stable housing, including practical life skills, money management, engagement in education, positive social/community connection and self-advocacy.

The Youth CONNECT program has been developed based on research and evidence relating to this group of young people, with the support of internal and external professional expertise and practice wisdom, particularly from the University of the Sunshine Coast. This knowledge and evidence base provides the foundational program components that are considered essential to effecting sustainable and long-term positive change in the lives of vulnerable young people.

The Youth CONNECT program has been developed with a 'housing first' approach, and combined with equal emphasis placed on supporting young people to develop key resilience factors of education, employment and community connection to successfully change their trajectory to achieving sustained 'homefulness'. This is supported through the delivery of a comprehensive case management framework focusing on therapeutic and practical strategies and actions to build resilience factors evidenced to significantly improve life outcomes and sustain long-term health and wellbeing well into adulthood, while reducing the risk of future homelessness.⁵

Young people participating in the Youth CONNECT program will have a range of multiple and complex needs, will have been in the out-of-home care system, will be (or be at risk of being) homeless, and require



Photo provided by Churches for Christ in Queensland

intensive support to increase resiliency factors for improved life-long wellbeing and decrease the risk of current and future homelessness. Participants will engage in the program for up to three years, be supported with access to safe, affordable and stable housing; education, training and employment opportunities; will develop formal and informal support networks and engage in personal development activities such as parenting, mental health and drug and alcohol programs.

For young people accessing Youth CONNECT the development of resilience to homelessness will be demonstrated through the following key indicators:

- maintaining safe and stable housing
- participating in work-readiness, educational engagement and qualifications
- employment stability
- undertaking personal development activity engagement for improved health, wellbeing and social connectedness.

Over the six and a half year period of the bond, Youth CONNECT will engage 300 young people aged 15 to 25 years who have been in out-of-home care and are at risk of homelessness. The program will commence at the end of 2017 to improve housing pathways to eligible young people in the surrounding areas of Townsville, Logan and Ipswich.

Endnotes

1. Cashmore J and Paxman M 1996, *Wards leaving care: A longitudinal study*, Department of Community Services, Sydney; Crane P, Kaur J and Burton J 2014, *Homelessness and leaving care: the experiences of young adults in Queensland and Victoria, and implications for practice*, Homelessness Research Collaboration, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, ACT; Mendes P 2009, Young people transitioning from state out-of-home care: Jumping hoops to access employment, *Family Matters*, no.83, pp.32–38. Retrieved from Young people transitioning from state out-of-home care: Jumping hoops to access employment Montgomery P, Donkoh C and Underhill K 2006, Independent living programs for young people leaving the care system: The state of the evidence. *Children and Youth Services Review*, no.28, pp.1435–1448. Retrieved from [https://www.spi.ox.ac.uk/uploads/tx_oxford/files/Independent living programs for young people leaving the care system — The state of the evidence.pdf](https://www.spi.ox.ac.uk/uploads/tx_oxford/files/Independent%20living%20programs%20for%20young%20people%20leaving%20the%20care%20system%20-%20The%20state%20of%20the%20evidence.pdf).
2. Queensland Treasury 2017, <https://www.treasury.qld.gov.au/growing-queensland/social-benefit-bonds-pilot-program/>
3. Gaetz S and Scott, F 2012, *Live, Learn, Grow: Supporting transitions to adulthood for homeless youth, a framework for the foyer in Canada*, The homelessness hub report series, report no 10.
4. Stein M 2005, *Resilience and young people leaving care: Overcoming the odds*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation York, UK.
5. Bromfield L and Osborn A 2007, 'Getting the big picture': A synopsis and critique of Australian out-of-home care research, *Child Abuse Prevention Issues* No. 26, Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Child Protection Clearinghouse Melbourne, Retrieved from <http://www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues26/issues26.html>.

Sustaining Young Tenancies: An Innovative Program to Prevent Homelessness

Dr Nicola Brackertz, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI)
and Adam Barnes, Brisbane Youth Service

How can we better sustain the tenancies of young people living in social housing?

This was the question posed by Brisbane Youth Service (BYS), and social housing providers from the *Under 1 Roof* consortium in 2015. Housing providers were clear that there was a gap in the service system regarding support for young tenants in social housing. They believed young people's tenancies were at greater risk of failure than other cohorts overall, putting young people at increased risk of homelessness, and suggested that the perceived likelihood of tenancy failure negatively affected allocation of available properties to young people.

BYS established a working group consisting of Bric Housing, Brisbane Housing Company, and The Department of Housing and Public Works (HPW), as well as The Department of Communities and the Queensland University of Technology. This group met regularly over a period of four months, providing advice and feedback regarding available practice evidence and frameworks to inform service model design. In December 2016 BYS submitted a proposal to HPW focused on improving outcomes for young tenants. Tenancy sustainment and Housing First principles were central to the proposal.

In August 2016, the pilot Sustaining Young Tenancies (SYT) project was funded by HPW. The first tenant was referred and supported in September 2016. Program design and development continued alongside tenancy support, in an environment of practice reflection and learning.

How is SYT different from other services?

SYT offers housing specific support to young people once they have achieved a social housing tenancy. This sets SYT apart from most other services, which focus on getting young people into housing, but offer little housing related support thereafter.

Collaborative, transparent and non-adversarial partnerships between SYT and housing providers lie at the heart of the model. Housing providers informed the service model design by identifying what works well or otherwise when working with support agencies. They identified frustration with what they experienced as previous adversarial relationships with support agencies, as well as poor communication, and support periods being closed prematurely.

The relationship triangle between young people, housing providers and SYT is the shared space that is critical to continued positive tenancy outcomes. From housing providers' perspective, a lack of engagement from young people and limited life skills often contribute to tenancy failure. SYT support facilitates young people's engagement with housing providers, educates them about housing processes (such as inspections and reviews), teaches them about tenancy rights and responsibilities as well as providing practical support in other life domains. The goal is that ultimately young people will be able to navigate on their own behalf as regards their housing and other systems.

What are the core elements of the SYT model?

Integration

The SYT model invests heavily in the partnership between support staff, young tenants and housing providers. A collaborative framework needs to be deliberately actioned day to day to reinforce and strengthen project integration.

Referral, service delivery tools and shared housing and support protocols help to enable a wrap-around approach and keep each party connected to the objective of sustaining tenancies. The scope and complexity of the work requires consistent and transparent communication strategies to identify issues and progress toward solutions.

Strategies that support regular and purposeful communication with the relevant housing provider have been key to the program's success. A shared housing and support plan is developed and reviewed via regular engagement, with roles for young people, support providers and the landlord, as needed.

Early Intervention

Early intervention prior to housing crisis offers the best opportunity for sustained tenancy outcomes. SYT actively encourages housing providers to refer young people from sign up, regardless of presenting indicators. Initially, referrals were few and at the crisis end of the spectrum. It took some time to establish trust with referring agencies and to promote the activation of early intervention referrals at sign up or before behaviour agreements, notices to remedy or to leave.

Housing providers can find it challenging to identify potential tenancy issues prior to the tenancy being at risk. Tenancy management is often structured around responding to breaches of a tenancy agreement so that the landlord will simply not be aware of potential issues until a young person is experiencing housing crises. Referral of young people who are already at immediate risk of eviction can limit available interventions to support tenancies to end well and divert exits to chronic homelessness.

Mobile Support

SYT provides assertive, outreach based support to tenants. Case management is focused on facilitating young tenants' experiential learning. It occurs alongside young people in their homes and as they negotiate the systems most important to their success. Mobile support allows staff to work with young people as they transition between tenancies as well as to participate in education and training, and formal (for example, specialist mental health) and informal (for example, sporting clubs) support networks.

Brokerage

Brokerage is critical for this target group. Young people often begin tenancies without capacity to manage the financial costs of their tenancy, including furnishing their property, paying essential bills or buying food. Brokerage assists with transition from crisis to stability, alongside planned support. Brokerage also assists young people to access education and training and other specialist services if required, including medical and mental health services.

Needs based support

Support periods ending prematurely contribute to tenancy failure. SYT provides support in accordance with needs and strengths of young people, allowing for flexible support that focuses on outcomes rather than number of support periods (throughputs).

Planning for independence

SYT has a focus on ensuring that young people transition and exit from the program well, continue to be able to sustain their tenancy and do not become homeless. If a young person is unable to sustain their tenancy,



Photo provided by Brisbane Youth Service

wherever possible, SYT works to ensure they have other appropriate housing.

Tenancy outcomes are affected by outcomes across psychosocial domains in a young tenant's life, including social connection, relationships, health and wellbeing, and the ability to navigate systems. The SYT team has recorded significant improvements in young people's tenancy outcomes alongside positive changes in their mental health, wellbeing and relationships. Sustaining tenancies has involved strengthening young people's ability and confidence to manage future crises without formal support. For some, this involves facilitating young people's improved connection and improved skills to self-manage informal supports

Transitions focused work takes time to manifest results and can be challenging to deliver. The SYT team assists young people to consider changes they have made, every six weeks. A standardised tool guides the reviews, which are facilitated informally. These tools assist to keep the work focussed and clearly understood. This helps the young person to acknowledge the change that they are achieving over time and prepare for independence from formal support.

The SYT project has established tools to support the case management process with young people and housing partners. A screening assessment and progress reviews have been integrated into case management practice, providing the backbone for shared housing and support plans. The tools help young people to set goals and acknowledge the change that they have made. They also enable housing providers to inform and acknowledge progress from their perspective. Housing providers offer regular feedback on their assessment of how the tenant is going at that point in time.

Working alongside young people

SYT's approach to working with young people is a critical success factor in the program.

SYT is a voluntary service; this differentiates it from other services and empowers young people, many of whom have previously only experienced mandated services and case management. Young people interviewed for the program evaluation have indicated that SYT being voluntary gives them a sense the service is there for them and works to support their best interests. This contributes to young people's positive attitude towards SYT and its case workers and facilitates engagement.



Image provided by Brisbane Youth Service

SYT employs a holistic and relational approach to working with YP, with a strong focus on guiding therapeutic relationships and role modelling. Key elements in the working relationship between SYT and YP are persistence, reliability, intimacy and respect. Young people interviewed for the evaluation frequently identified their relationship with the SYT workers as one of the best aspects of the program, as it gave them someone trusted to turn to for the advice and support that was generally lacking in their lives.

The vast majority of tenants who are referred to SYT are enthusiastic about receiving support. For some, a referral initiated by their landlord, or shame about the state of their

tenancy can be obstacles to be overcome. SYT uses a model of persistent and respectful outreach. This is a critical success factor in engaging young people either at intake or when they disengage from the program.

SYT uses a model of case management which is strengths focused, goal directed and regularly reviewed. Regular review of case plans against goals allows support to be responsive to young people's changing needs. Regular review of goals and progress allows young people to reflect and acknowledge their progress and growth helps them to take responsibility for their actions and the solutions to the challenges that present in their lives.

Outcomes Achieved

Early findings from an evaluation of the SYT program, which is currently underway, indicate that as a result of working with SYT, housing providers are more likely to allocate housing to young people. The majority of young people are now referred to SYT at intake into housing or at the first sign of trouble, facilitating early intervention.

At 12 months of operation, 91 per cent of young people participating in the SYT project have sustained their housing or have moved to more appropriate accommodation; they have improved their communication with housing providers; have increased confidence in their abilities to manage their housing and lives; and are better able to navigate the system. At the end of the support period with the SYT program housing providers rated 77 per cent of young people's tenancies as 'doing great' or 'doing well'. Those who noted concerns and gave lower ratings indicated that the overall situation was generally better than it could have been because of the SYT program involvement.

As part of a psychosocial evaluation when finalising support, SYT young people identified most change in the areas of life skills, mental and emotional wellbeing and in meeting basic needs (housing and financial stability). These were closely followed by improved connection with formal or informal supports and participation in employment, education, other meaningful activity. Young tenants identified the following aspects of SYT as most helpful to them: learning about tenancy; learning to negotiate systems; mobile support from workers; connection to others and the professionalism of the program.

While it is too early to draw conclusions about the long-term impact of SYT on outcomes for young tenants, the available evidence indicates that SYT fills an important gap in the delivery of homelessness prevention and early intervention services for young people and contributes towards breaking the cycle of homelessness.

We are not all the same: Exploring Difference in Young People's Experiences of Couch Surfing Versus Sleeping Rough

Rhianon Vichta and Katie Hail-Jares, Brisbane Youth Service

*'Couch surfing is usually the start to the slippery slope of youth homelessness'*¹

Recent surveys of young Australians show more young people couch surfing than ever before, although not all classified themselves as homeless.² Envisioning couch surfing as a form of extended sleep-over with a friend has contributed to the perception that couch surfing is a secondary and potentially less concerning form of homelessness,³ or even not a form of youth homelessness at all.⁴

While young people couch surfing may experience a degree of instability or reduced comfort, the assumption is that it is considerably safer and healthier than sleeping rough. There is considerable research that supports the highly negative impacts of rough sleeping including violence, poor physical and mental health, social isolation, substance abuse and juvenile crime.^{5,6} When framed by that research, couch surfing seems like the preferable option, promoting less risk and less exposure to harm.

But does couch surfing live up to this assumption? Commonly referred to as 'hidden homelessness',⁷ couch surfing is seen as a type of secondary homelessness in census data and other homelessness definitions.⁸ To date, there has been a considerable lack of research on couch surfing and little attention given to understanding how the experiences of couch surfing youth differ from other homeless young people, specifically those sleeping rough.⁹

Here, we share the preliminary findings from a comparative analysis of Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) client data collected at intake and exit from support. Analysis is focussed on the questions:

- How do rough sleeping youth differ in terms of demographics and personal histories from other homeless young people?
- How do couch surfing and rough sleeping youth differ from each other?
- How does housing status impact engagement with services?

In the 2016–17 year, 808 client records were coded for statistical analysis. Bivariate statistical analysis allows researchers to know if the differences between two groups arose by random change or because of a factor of interest (such as housing status). Of those 808 participants, 105 (13 per cent) were sleeping rough and 226 (27.8 per cent) were couch surfing. We first compared each group of interest to all others and then ran an additional analysis to look for differences between these two groups.

Analysis showed a number of key emergent themes:

Young women are significantly more likely to be couch surfing and less likely to be sleeping rough.

Within the whole sample, female-identifying young people accounted for just over half (53.8 per cent) of all young people seeking BYS support, however almost 70 per cent of those couch surfing identified as female compared to just 40 per cent of young people who are rough sleeping.

LGBTIQ+ young people are less likely to be sleeping rough than their cis or straight counterparts and are slightly more likely to be couch surfing.

Nearly a quarter (23.5 per cent) of young people who come to BYS identify as LGBTIQ+. Among those sleeping rough, though, the proportion of LGBTIQ+ youth drops

to 17 per cent. Comparably, among couch surfers, the proportion increases to 26 per cent.

Reported drug use is about the same between couch surfers and youth who sleep rough.

Contrary to popular stereotypes, only slightly more rough sleepers reported drug use in the past three months compared to those who were couch surfing (55.1 per cent vs. 45.1 per cent). Those sleeping rough reported similarly elevated rates of injecting drug use (45 per cent vs. 35 per cent). Compared to all other young people, though, rates of substance use among youth who were sleeping rough were higher. Young people who were sleeping rough also reported significantly higher rates of tobacco use (81 per cent) compared to all other participants and couch surfing young people (63.9 per cent).

Young people who are sleeping rough are more likely to identify their current substance use as a problem.

While drug use rates themselves were similar, 29 per cent of youth who were sleeping rough said their current substance use was a problem compared to less than a fifth (18 per cent) of couch-surfers. Yet nearly identical proportions of both groups (48 per cent of couch surfers and 50 per cent of those who sleep rough) reported that their substance use had been a problem in the past.

Young people who were couch surfing rated their mental health more poorly than all other participants and more poorly than young rough sleepers. When presented with a scale ranging from very poor (one) to very good (five), couch surfers, on average, rated their mental health at a 2.6, compared to an average of 2.8 overall. Remarkably, mental health ratings by young people sleeping

rough were at 3.1, higher than the rest of the young people coming to BYS, as well as higher than those who couch surf. Furthermore, couch surfers were significantly more likely to have attempted suicide or experienced suicidal ideation in the past (39 per cent) compared to rough sleepers (28 per cent). Though not statistically different, they were also more likely to report a history of self-harm (14 per cent vs. 11 per cent).

Though not statistically different, couch surfers tended to have contact with BYS services less often than youth sleeping rough.

Couch surfers accessed BYS services on average 15 times between 2016–2017, compared to 21 times for youth who identified that they were sleeping rough at intake. With 15

annual visits, couch surfers have one of the lowest engagement rates of all youth; only young people currently in an institution or in stable private or public housing had lower rates of contact with BYS.

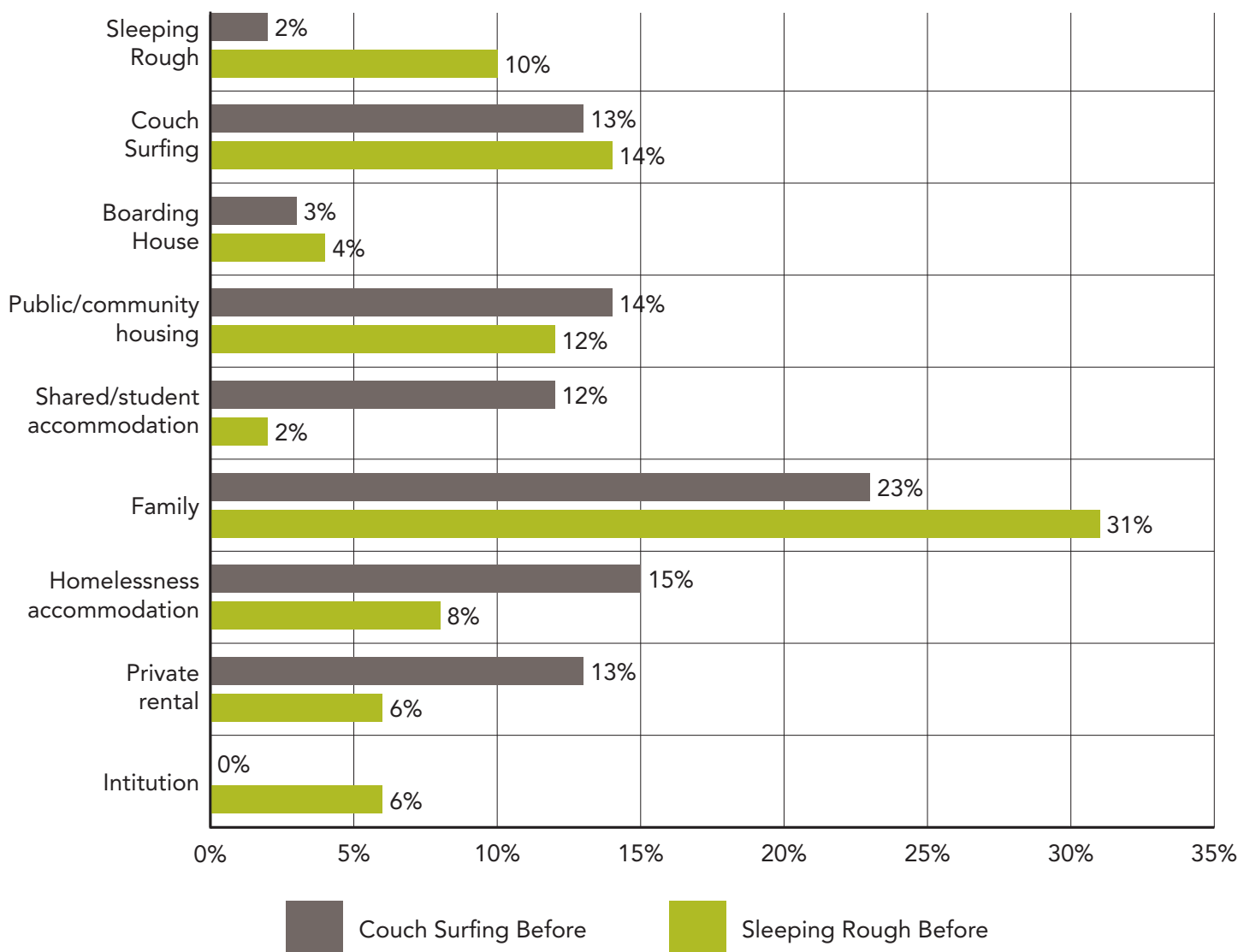
Young people who were couch surfing at intake reported more positive housing outcomes when they exited from services.

Tracking down homeless young people to measure their outcomes after accessing support is inherently complex and challenging.¹⁰

In 2016–17, outcomes were able to be measured for 40 per cent of young people who disengaged from support (206 individuals), and closure rates were statistically equivalent for young people who were rough sleeping (64 per cent) and those who were couch surfing (71 per cent). Where housing outcomes were able to be

measured, couch surfers tended to have more stable, independent and longer term accommodation.

19 per cent of young people couch surfing moved into a private rental, 14 per cent into community/public housing, 10 per cent were living in shared or student accommodation and 31 per cent moved to live with family. Just 7 per cent were continuing to couch surf and 5 per cent had converted to sleeping rough. Conversely, among young people who were sleeping rough at intake, 10 per cent were continuing to sleep rough after accessing support, usually brief support only, and 15 per cent had begun couch surfing. A similar proportion of young people moved into community/public housing (12 per cent), however only one young person who was sleeping rough was able to secure a private rental, and



Housing Outcomes (% of young people assessed)

Figure 1: BYS Outcomes Data 2015-2017:
Housing Outcomes for Young People Couch Surfing vs Sleeping Rough at Assessment.

the most common outcome was for young people sleeping rough to move to live with family (35 per cent).

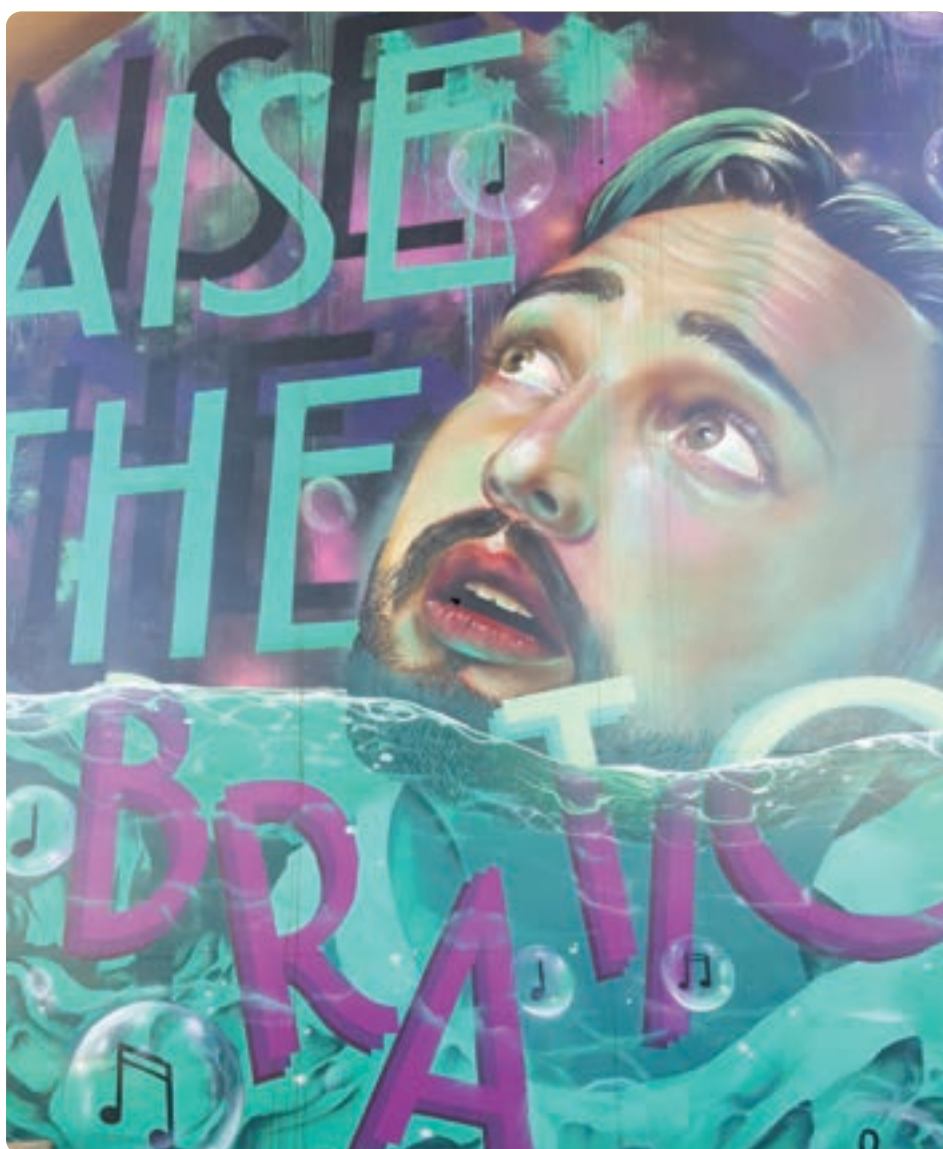
Application to Service

Contrary to common perceptions, couch surfing does not appear to be a substantively 'healthier' option for many young people. The high rates of suicidal risk, low self-assessment of mental health and lower likelihood of identifying a current substance abuse issue (despite similar rates of use) among couch surfers are red flags for service providers. Together they indicate that this living situation should not be seen as a preferable or acceptable 'stop gap' form of accommodation, but rather should be considered a differently, but still as a substantially disadvantaging form of homelessness.¹¹

At this point, we can only theorise about the reasons for the differences. It may be that more vulnerable groups of young people tend to couch surf rather than sleep rough. It may also be that the couch surfing experience impacts on mental health in ways that are not the same for those who are sleeping rough. In many ways, our preliminary findings support a harm reduction approach to working with different forms of homelessness.

Young people should be recognised as active agents in their own lives, and in some circumstances, the psychological aspects of sleeping rough may be a preferred alternative, for some young people, to the stresses of negotiating a couch to sleep on, or the influencing impact of the other people living in those households.

Furthermore, the lower levels of service engagement among couch surfers may indicate that they are either less likely to self-identify as in immediate need of homeless support, or may be inadvertently regarded by workers as being a lesser priority for homelessness intervention. Consideration should be made of sector and professional language that includes couch surfing as a form of problematic homelessness. With our results suggesting that traditionally vulnerable populations, such as LGBTIQ+ youth and young women have higher rates of couch surfing,



Brisbane street art

targeted service responses to these populations is especially crucial.

Further research is strongly recommended to better understand the subjective experiences of young Queenslanders in the context of their different homelessness experiences and pathways.

Endnotes

1. This quote was part of a 2013 Salvation Army campaign to raise awareness about youth homeless. See coverage of the event here: <http://www.bluemountaingazette.com.au/story/2545029/couch-surfing-the-start-to-homelessness/>
2. Terui S and Hsieh E 2016, 'Not Homeless Yet. I'm Kind of Couch Surfing': Finding Identities for People at a Homeless Shelter, *Social Work in Public Health*, vol.31, no.7, pp.688–699.
3. McLoughlin P J 2013, Couch surfing on the margins: the reliance on temporary living arrangements as a form of homelessness amongst school-aged home leavers, *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol.16, no.4, pp.521–545.
4. Curry S R, Morton M, Matjasko J L, Dworsky A, Samuels G M and Schlueter D 2017, Youth Homelessness and Vulnerability: How Does Couch Surfing Fit?, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, vol.60, no's.1–2, pp.17–24.
5. MacKenzie D, Flatau P, Steen A and Thielking M 2016, *The cost of youth homelessness in Australia research briefing*, Australian Policy online: <http://apo.org.au/system/files/53029/apo-nid53029-75531.pdf>
6. Larsen L, Poortinga E and Hurdle D E 2004. *Sleeping Rough: Exploring the Differences Between Shelter-Using and Non-Shelter-Using Homeless Individuals, Environment and Behavior*, vol.36, no.4, pp.578–591.
7. McLoughlin P J 2013, op cit, p.521.
8. Mackenzie D and Chamberlain C 2008, *Youth homelessness in Australia 2006 Hawthorn, Counting the Homeless 2006 Project*, retrieved from: https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/youth_homelessness_report.pdf.
9. Curry S R, et al 2017, op cit.
10. Vichta R 2017, Why is it so hard? The Challenges of Collecting Youth Homelessness Outcomes Data, *Parity*, vol.30, no.3, pp.24–25.
11. McLoughlin P J 2013, op cit.

The Recovery Orientation Model in Action: How Meaningful Change Can, and Does, Happen for Homeless Young People

Jacqui de la Rue, Brisbane Youth Service

A wide set of sector reports (for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Reports 2013,¹ 2014²) all suggest that mental health has become a central health issue for Australians, aged 12 to 25. Much of these reports do not address homelessness, but the following points from the 2013 National Mental Health Report,³ are important to the current discussion about how homeless young people access services:

- Young people were less likely than other age groups to seek professional help; only 31 per cent of young women and 13 per cent of young men with mental health problems had sought any professional help;
- Young people are most likely to talk to friends or family members as the first step in seeking support, and finally;
- Young people experienced multiple barriers to accessing health care, including negative attitudes of staff towards young people, and anxiety and embarrassment about disclosing personal issues.

Homeless young people face these exact same issues, and experience additional concerns, including involvement with multiple service sectors, living with significant mental health conditions, substance misuse, and exposure to trauma and violence. This is reflected in the *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia Study*⁴ which compared the quality of life of youth who were identified as homeless, with those who were housed. Their results found that:

- 63 per cent of the homeless youth who were surveyed had been placed in some form of out-of-home care by the time that they had turned 18
- 53 per cent reported that they had been diagnosed with at least one mental health condition in their lifetime
- 39 per cent reported police coming to their home because of violence between parents on one or more occasions, with 14 per cent experiencing police coming to their house more than ten times.

Given these complex and interacting issues, innovative mental health

approaches are needed to increase access to services that are timely, appropriate, youth-friendly, affordable, and support meaningful recovery.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the Recovery Orientation Model, used in an on-site counselling service for homeless young people who experience a dual diagnosis (meaning a mental health concern and a substance misuse issue). Results demonstrate that young people experienced individual levels of change (as measured through the DASS-21, K-10, and a suite of drug and alcohol measures), but found maintaining change very difficult. This paper suggests that youth based mental health approaches need to include clinical indicators of change (such as reduced depression and anxiety) as well as addressing the impact of social determinants of health (such as housing, gaining meaningful employment, and improved access to services).

The concept of recovery became the bench-mark standard for Australian national mental health policies in

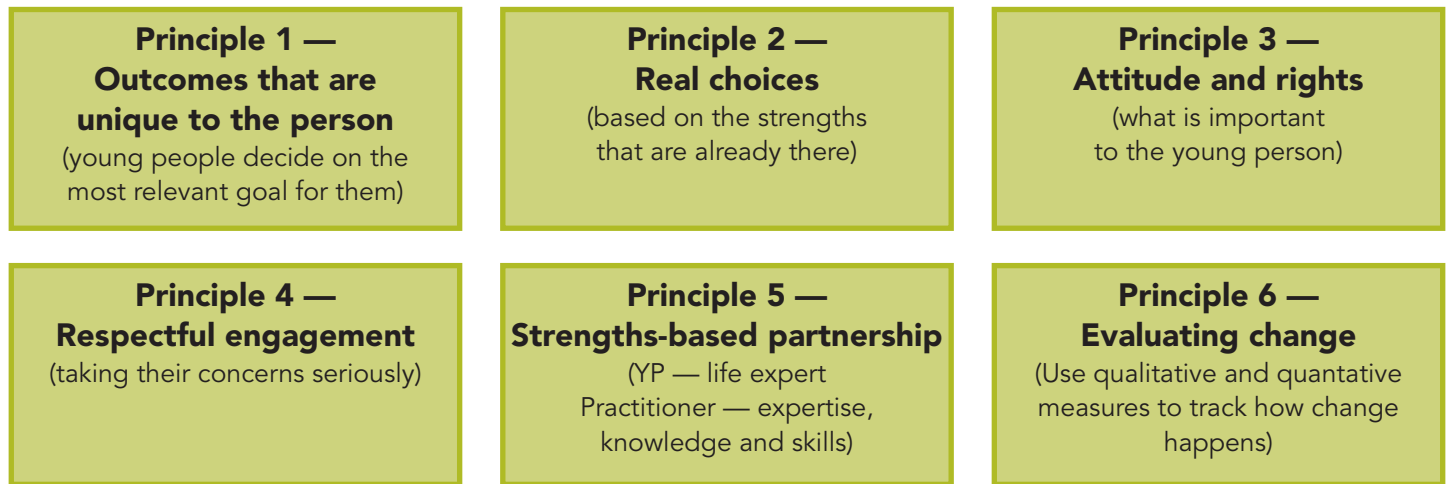


Figure 1: The Recovery Principles in Practice

Reference: The national framework for recovery-orientated mental health services: A guide for practitioners and providers, 2013.

Table 1: The Referral Trends to BYS on-site counselling service, for dual diagnosis (n=458, 2012-2017).

Reason for referrals	Key referral combinations (by gender)
Alcohol and drugs (35 per cent) Dealing with anger (60 per cent,) Feeling better about myself (30 per cent) Goal setting for the future (70 per cent) Relationships (70 per cent) Depression and anxiety (75 per cent) Ways of coping better (85 per cent) How many options did young people select at referral? • one option: <5 per cent (n=23) • 2-4 options: 20 per cent (n= 92) • 5-7 or more: 75 per cent (n=343)	Females (n= 247, 54 per cent): Relationships , Goal setting, depression and anxiety; ways of coping better, feeling better about myself Males (n= 196, 43 per cent): Dealing with anger , feeling better about myself, ways of coping better, goal setting. Transgender (n=15, <3 per cent): Ways of coping better , dealing with anger, feeling better about myself, relationships, goal setting.

2013, resulting in the National Mental Health Recovery Framework publications.

The key idea is that recovery can, and does, happen,⁵ and that rather than being a logical progression through set stages, recovery is an individual journey,⁶ and is not concerned with achieving a certain state of being 'recovered'.

In practice, the recovery model is an over-arching framework with six practice principles (see Figure 1) all focused upon valuing the lived experience of the person, and the generation of recovery-based goals that is meaningful and relevant to the person.

For young people then, recovery is about taking control of their own lives and nominating goals that may, or may not, be related to traditional clinical indicators of 'wellness'.⁷ That is, young people may not nominate recovery goals that practitioners want them to, or expect them to. Table 1 demonstrates this reality for homeless young people referred to the on-site counselling service at Brisbane Youth Service (BYS). Although dual diagnosis was evident in 95 per cent of all of the referrals to the program (n=458), only 35 per cent actually nominated alcohol and drugs as the main reason to seek counselling. Instead, young people nominated multiple reasons

(75 per cent nominating five or more reasons for referral), and selected: ways of coping better (85 per cent), depression and anxiety (75 per cent), relationships (70 per cent) and dealing with anger (60 per cent) as more relevant than alcohol and drugs (35 per cent). In fact, all of the issues are inter-related, and ultimately demonstrates how living with a dual diagnosis impacts wellbeing on many levels.

For service providers, the recovery approach is about working from a strengths-based collaboration, and resisting the urge to pathologise young people.⁸ The framework does this by shifting the therapeutic focus away from asking young people what is wrong with them (the medical model), to asking what has happened to them. Hence the practice style is more respectful, non-judgmental, free of jargon, and carries a sense of hope that change can occur for a young person — despite what has happened to them.

So how does this framework translate into observable service delivery outcomes, and how does change actually occur? Figure 1 showed that measurement of change using a combination of evidenced-based tools (such as those found in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy), and qualitative measures (such as the Most Significant Change Story) is paramount to tracking progress.

Of the 458 young people referred to the BYS counselling service (see Table 1), 221 engaged in on-going and regular therapy over 12 to 18 months. Depression Anxiety and Stress (DASS-21) scores revealed that young people reported reduced depression and anxiety,



Brisbane street art

Table 2: The lived experience of how change happens for young people

Change scale	(N=221)	Change story title (MSC) quotes by young people
I did not make the change	20 per cent	'I thought change would be easier' 'It might be bad for me, but [drugs] help me cope' 'When I've sorted out [other things], I will deal with the drugs'
I changed for a few weeks/months	15 per cent	'My friend kicked his/her habit, why didn't I?'
I made the change, but I don't always stick to it	40 per cent	'I have some relapses, I'm still learning all this new stuff.'
I made the change, <6 months ago, sticking to it	20 per cent	'I tried it out, I didn't get it all right, and I learnt as I went on'
I made the change, >6 months ago, sticking to it	5 per cent	'I kept it up, I gave myself permission to fail and then keep going.'

however, no reduction was noted on the stress scale (which contain items about responding to situational anxiety). These results suggest that individual changes were in-fact subject to on-going stressors found in the external environment (for example, 'I am still homeless' or 'I am still in that domestic violence relationship'). The Most Significant Change (MSC) approach was then used to help identify how change happened for young people, and in what situations or contexts.

So, while this evidence shows that for 20 per cent of young people found change difficult, the other 80 per cent of young people reported improvements in their thinking, feeling, problem solving abilities and their sense of self-awareness (see Figure 2).

In conclusion, it seems fitting to conclude this paper with quotes from young people who received a recovery-based service:

'I'll be honest, I did not want to come to see the Psych's here. But then I noticed some of my mates, and the changes they made. So I said I'll only go once. That was a year ago. I'm still coming along. It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.'

— M, ATSI, 22

'[This has] helped me with my problems and provided me with someone I could talk to. They took what I said seriously. I felt heard.'

— F, 16

Endnotes

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2013, *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: 2012–2013*, Drug treatment series, No. 24, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.
2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014, *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia: 2012–2013*, Drug treatment series, No. 21, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.
3. Department of Health and Ageing 2013, *National Mental Health Report 2013: Tracking progress of mental health reform in Australia 1993–2011*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.
4. McKenzie D, Flatau P, Steen A and Theilking M 2016, *The cost of youth homelessness in Australia: Research Briefing*, Report prepared by Swinburne University Institute for Social Research, the University of Western Australia, Charles Sturt University, the Salvation Army, Mission Australia, and Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn.
5. Gordon S and Ellis P 2013, Recovery of evidenced-based practice, *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*, vol. 22, pp. 3–14.
6. Drake R and Whitley R 2014, Recovery and severe mental illness: Description and analysis, *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 59, no. 5, pp. 236–242.
7. Shera W and Ramon S 2013, Challenges in the Implementation of Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Policies and Services, *International Journal of Mental Health*, vol.42, no's 2 and 3, pp.17–42.
8. Gordon S and Ellis P 2013, op cit.

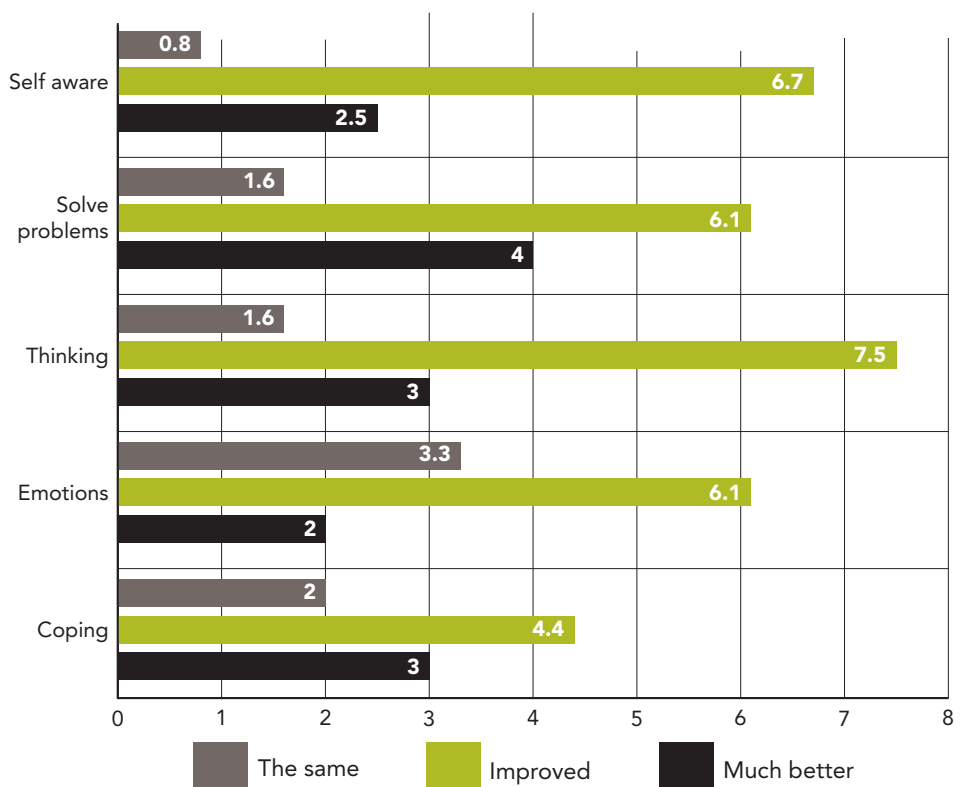


Figure 2: How change happened

On the Road to Independence

Kylie Dodds, Children, Youth and Families, Churches of Christ Care

What happens to a young person who has become homeless because they are escaping family and domestic violence and family and relationship breakdown? What happens to youth ageing out of foster care?

The ability to begin living independently at a young age with limited life skills and resources is challenging to overcome for young people. However, with stable supported accommodation, young people can begin to build a foundation towards independence.

Churches of Christ Housing Services (CofCHS), Ipswich Independent Youth Services (IIYS) and the Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) created and piloted the 'Supporting People in Share Housing (SPin)' transitional program in early 2015.

The SPin model was a local response in the Ipswich Local Government Area that addresses the barriers faced by young single people on low to moderate incomes including; lack of rental history, the concerns and perceived risk to private landlords of leasing to young people and the lack

of one bedroom housing stock in the Ipswich area.

CofCHS' manages the houses under a unique rent-setting model which entails three separate young people renting under individual tenancy agreements in the one house. They each pay a weekly fixed rent that includes utilities and service charges (that is, electricity, gas and internet). The rent is set at a rate that can attract the maximum possible Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). This model achieves both affordability for the young people and



Photo provided by Churches for Christ Housing Services Ltd



Photo provided by Churches for Christ Housing Services Ltd

financial viability for the community housing provider. This unique model enables the young people to provide a rental history to meet future private landlord criteria and the housing provider is able to recoup operating costs. The inclusion of internet helps the young people to budget effectively and provides them with increased disposable income than traditional rent models due to the ability to attract CRA. The fixing of rents ensures that rents do not vary with increased income levels therefore removing any disincentive to youths to gain employment or save towards the cost of private rental.

The SPin model provides a safe haven and home environment for young males and females aged between 16 to 25 years with each property housing up to three youths. Since its inception, the pilot program has expanded from one to three homes and has assisted 18 young people with 100 per cent of clients exiting to secure and sustainable accommodation.

Dean and Daniel are two of the many young people CofCHS' and IIYS support in their collaborative SPin program. SPin has enabled Daniel and Dean a safe stable home combined with the support of experienced case managers to provide them with a pathway to independence.

The partnership between CofCHS and IIYS is central to the success of young people (like Dean and Daniel) overcoming barriers to independence and realising their aspirations. With assistance from the Department of Housing and Public works, CofCHS provide safe, affordable, transitional accommodation and IIYS provide the specialist support services to help young people get back on their feet and living independently. Taking a person-centred approach, IIYS staff assess each person's needs and then tailor services to meet those needs. The IIYS case manager's and young person's work together to develop personal plans, providing the client with specific and manageable goals to work towards.

At such a young age both Dean and Daniel's family and living situations had broken down and they didn't have anywhere to go or did not feel safe in the place they were staying in. They came to (IIYS) at different times but with the same need to find some stability and get support to start afresh.

Daniel moved from his small hometown to Brisbane at the age of 18. He lived with his grandfather for nearly two years and started studying a course in digital media and interactive gaming at Evocca College. However, when conflict started at

home, he decided to move out with friends from college. They did not know at the time but the primary tenant of the new property was a dangerous addict. The stresses of living there were too much for Daniel to attend college, as he would often stay awake all night fearing for his safety. Through some old friends and caseworkers, he eventually found IIYS who offered him a safe place to live and a new start.

Life had also been tough for Dean. He was only 11 when he left home. Dean constantly moved around and was in and out of homelessness.

IIYS broker, monitor and support the relationships between the share house members. Dean and Daniel were matched well to the share house and making friends was easy. Dean says it only took an hour of living under the same roof before they became friends'. It is clear to see what a great friendship Daniel and Dean have formed — they bounce off each other in conversation and break out in fits of laughter. They make a good team and work in well together to ensure bills are paid on time and the household chores and cooking is shared equally between them.

The SPin program is where Dean and Daniel's lives are starting to take a new positive direction by providing them with the guidance and opportunity to gain experience and skills to manage the pros and cons of share housing in a supported environment. IIYS have supported their transition into a new share house arrangement in the private rental market and the pilot program has provided the young men with a pathway out of homelessness.

With stable supported accommodation, Dean has been able to address some issues, sort through his finances and is looking for work in the hospitality industry as a bar tender. Daniel has identified his keen interest in pursuing a career in Information and Communication Technology and is working towards finalising a course in ICT. The IIYS case workers will continue to support the Daniel and Dean as they transition to a private rental, helping them to take the steps towards the lives they deserve and aspire.

Creating Digital Pathways Out of Homelessness: Digital Technology Design for Young People, Wellbeing and Engagement with Support

Rhianon Vichta, Brisbane Youth Service (BYS)

and Dr Karleen Gwinner, Adjunct Research Fellow, Latrobe University, Health Sciences

Improving young people's engagement with, and pathways through, the homelessness service systems is a priority for the Queensland youth and homelessness sectors. Young people accessing homelessness services are often highly transient and their engagement with support is commonly unpredictable, opportunistic, sporadic and crisis-driven. This can negatively impact homelessness service providers' capacity to provide consistent support to enable young people to achieve sustainable longer term change. With the ever-increasing migration of contemporary culture into the digital space, there is a growing need to better understand the potential role that online technologies such as interactive apps and websites can play in both enhancing young people's engagement with support and

promoting better wellbeing outcomes for highly vulnerable homeless young people.

As early adopting and frequent users of web-based technology, young people see the internet as a valuable source of help and information.¹ Nascent research supports the use of digital technology (digitech) to promote young people's health and wellbeing.² Apps and internet sites that support self-tracking of daily activities and goals are evidenced to promote empowerment and more active engagement with wellbeing in the broader population.³ Mobile phone based technologies have been found to be particularly effective for young people experiencing mental illness.^{4,5} However, we know less about how digitech can be used with and by young people who are homeless for physical and mental health and wellbeing. The

homelessness sector, and particularly youth homelessness services, need to learn more about the role digitech plays in vulnerable young people's lives, and how we, as service providers, can potentially use information and communications technology to achieve better engagement and more effective outcomes.⁶

In a recent service user consultation, BYS asked young people about how they currently use digital technology in relation to their own wellbeing. Through a creative visioning process the consultation examined innovative approaches to using technology to promote youth wellbeing, how young people use apps and websites for their own benefit, and explored ways to improve their connection with support when they need it. A series of interactive workshops, with

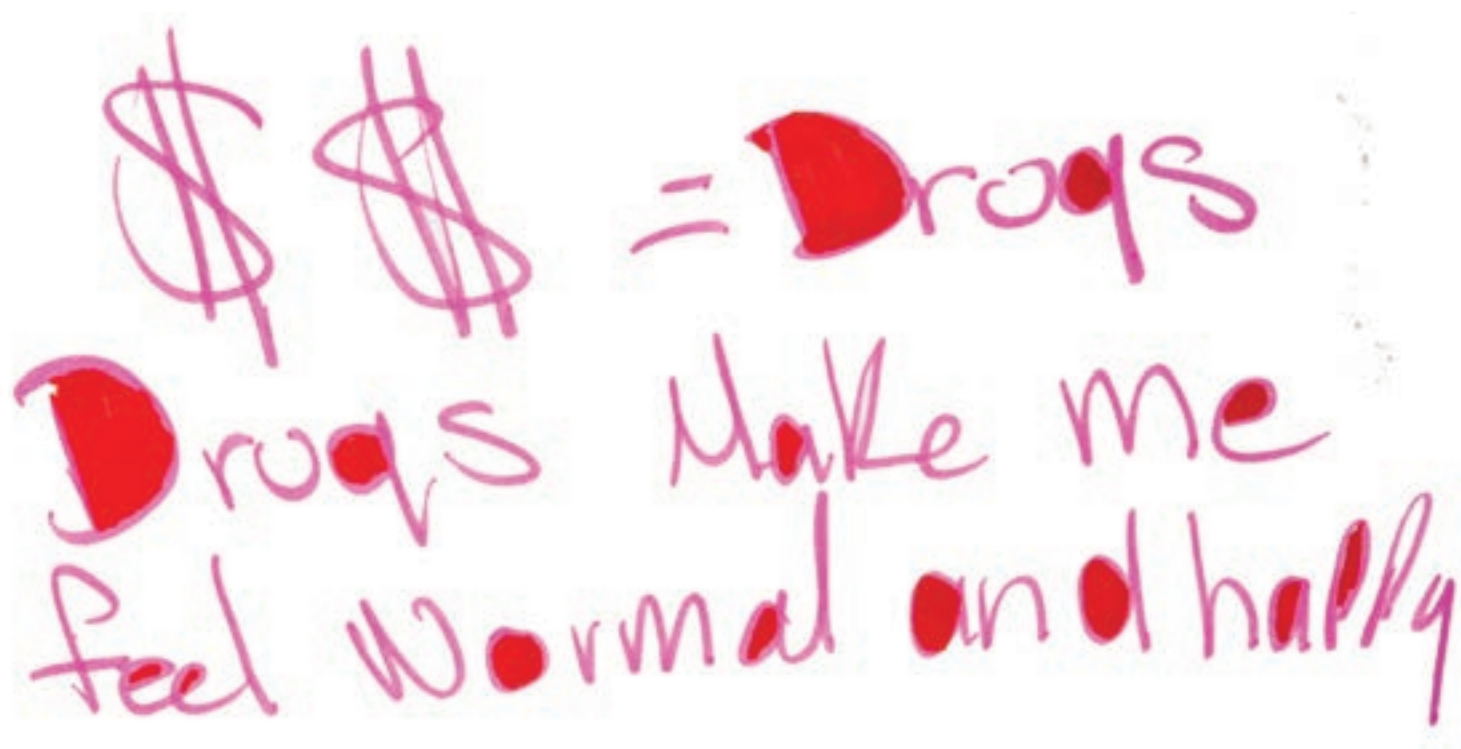


Figure 1. What is wellbeing — visual and text based interpretations from workshop participants



twenty young people aged 16 to 25 years old, yielded insight into the type of commitments and practices that may enable meaningful engagement with 'at-risk' young people in future development of digital technology support tools.

Insight into young people's perspectives of wellbeing emphasised, unsurprisingly, that being homeless directly impacted their capacity to access resources to 'be well'; and that addressing the impact of homelessness was 'really important for your wellbeing — like to be clean, having clean clothes, food, sleep, medical attention'.⁷ Young people understood wellbeing as a human right, in that they had a right to the basic necessities in life that underpin wellbeing. Recognising that young people who experience homelessness are highly likely to have

been exposed to disenfranchisement, inequity and injustice, the participants particularly emphasised the critical role that a sense of fairness and being treated with respect played in both experiencing wellbeing, as well as, in their engagement with support services. The centrality of respect, integrity and self-determination offered a different perspective to the dominant wellbeing frameworks adopted in youth services and literature.^{8,9} Respect, integrity and self-determination were consistently conveyed as themes into young people's actual and potential engagement with technology. The findings of this research emphasised the need to centre technology design around structurally and procedurally supporting rights-based principles as fundamental to young people's wellbeing and responses to the tools.

The basic principle of respecting young people's rights and autonomy extended into a clear need for design flexibility to allow young people to self-define and evolve their own wellbeing goals and interactions with support through technology. Findings from the consultation clearly showed that young people's conceptualisation and enactment of wellbeing was potentially contradictory. Young people described happiness, health and safety as all fundamentally important elements of wellbeing. However, their chosen pathways to happiness did not always align with health or even safety (Figure 1).

Young people's drive for happiness may potentially result in homelessness and compromised health. While there is research highlighting the weak and sometimes counterintuitive relationships between

an individual's objective life conditions and their subjective sense of well-being,¹⁰ service providers do not usually think of young people's goals as conflicting. That is, that progress in one aspect of wellbeing may be associated with loss or decreases in others. Where their goals in relation to change were not compatible, young people were clear that they needed to be free to choose their own pathway and not be boxed into imposed or adult perspectives on what they 'should' be doing. Technology design needs to, therefore, be flexible enough to allow young people to creatively express and navigate their own individualised self-identified priorities. This contra-indicates the format of self-tracking against pre-set or pre-determined wellbeing goals.

The integration of digital tools that promote youth wellbeing and support the effectiveness of worker–young person support processes should reinforce interactions that extend tenets of self-determination and the young person's control. It should be noted that self-determination does not equate to self-help. To satisfy self-determination principles young people require access to information to be informed, to opportunities for learning and to participate in ongoing dialogues. They need to be supported in choosing and attaining goals, and young people identify the important role played by relevant and encouraging feedback.

Young people in the consultation strongly affirmed that engagement and support through digitech must primarily be built on trusted personal interactions. This was particularly important for use of digital tools in homelessness service delivery. Young people wanted to know that they could use apps or tools to communicate with someone they knew, and who knew their story. Online privacy was acknowledged as important and necessitated knowing they had a trusted relationship with the workers who sit behind the app or website to support their wellbeing and housing needs. While young people's capacity for agency, self-care and joint responsibility were prioritised, these were in the context of a critical need to build and have a meaningful and trusted relationships.

It could be argued that worker and agency support is of utmost important when there is limited stable healthy parental (or carer) involvement in the young person's life and in which they do not have the social capital scaffolding (intimacy and belonging) associated with family. This provokes a conclusion that digital technology designed to be used by highly vulnerable homeless young people can be used to enhance but, not replace personalised support. Digital tools must be designed to be an individualised personal dialogue that sits within a therapeutic relationship, as opposed to being a widely disseminated source of generic or standardised advice or information.

Overall the findings from the consultation indicated that the design and integration of digital tools should be simple, engaging, creative and through multi-modal interactive platforms, available both online and offline. When embedded within an established therapeutic relationship, an app or website can facilitate creative self-development and enhanced pathways of communication with trusted support. Further exploration of intentionally integrating inter-sectoral collaboration is recommended to challenge traditional boundaries of service delivery and increase the potential reach of young people's networking, knowledge production, conversations, and innovative expression. Digital strategies supported through inter-sectoral networks could potentially cross boundaries to enhance protective factors, increase access to resources, build awareness, support advocacy, and provide practical ways for young people to exercise control, expression and choice for their wellbeing. This may require agencies and services to think differently about how they can share and expand resources and open up new opportunities to engage with young people across varied sites.

There is a clear need for opportunities for young people themselves to engage with support and enhance wellbeing through online pathways that allow self-expression to flourish in the context of client-led information sharing platforms. This requires

thinking 'youthfully' about how information and communication can meaningfully be exchanged in a digital space, beyond basic referral pathways and generic, broad scale tips or information.

The full consultation research report is available at http://brisyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/YouEngageTechnical-Report_Final.docx

Endnotes

1. Mission Australia, in association with Black Dog Institute 2015, *Young People's Mental Health over the Years: Youth Survey 2014*, Mission Australia, Sydney.
2. Boydell K M, Hodgins M, Pignatiello A, Teshima J and Willis D 2014, Using Technology to Deliver Mental Health Services to Children and Youth: A Scoping Review, *Journal of Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, vol.23, no.2, pp.87–99.
3. Charlesworth K, Jamieson M, Butler C D and Davey R 2015, The future healthcare?, *Australian Health Review*, no.39, pp.444–447.
4. Forchuk C, Reiss J, Eichstedt J, Singh D, Collins K, Rudnick A, Walsh J, Ethridge P, Kutcher S and Fisman S 2016, The Youth-Mental Health Engagement Network: An Exploratory Pilot Study of a Smartphone and Computer-Based Personal Health Record for Youth Experiencing Depressive Symptoms, *International Journal of Mental Health*, no.45, pp.205–222.
5. Blanchard M 2011, Navigating the Digital Disconnect: Understanding the Use of Information Communication Technology by the Youth Health Workforce to Improve Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol.48, no.2, p.83.
6. Blanchard M, Metcalf A, Degney J, Herrman H and Burns J 2008, Rethinking the Digital Divide: Findings from a Study of Marginalised Young People's ICT Use, *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.27, no.4, pp.35–42.
7. Gwinner K, Melrose P and Moffatt A 2017, *Digital Wellbeing, Youth Engagement Consultation Project: Technical Report*. Brisbane, Australia, Kids Helpline, and Brisbane Youth Service, doi: 10.13140/RG.2.2.27148.92805, p.51.
8. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 2013, *Report Card: the Wellbeing of Young Australians*, retrieved from: <http://www.aracy.org.au/projects/report-card-the-wellbeing-of-young-australians>
9. Sharma R 2017, *Global Youth Wellbeing Index*, Retrieved from: <http://www.youthindex.org/sites/default/files/2017-Global-Youth-Wellbeing-Index.pdf>
10. Sagiv L and Schwartz S H 2000, Value priorities and subjective well-being: direct relations and congruity effects, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, no.30, pp.177–198.

The Ethical Dimension of Fundraising in the Homelessness Sector

Laura Watson, Brisbane Youth Service

Is there ever truly an ethical way of presenting someone's suffering and misfortunes?

When speaking for others, sharing and 'benefiting' from someone's own words, what ethical guideposts should we navigate by?

There is ongoing debate regarding the appropriate representation of recipients in charity campaign materials that are intended to accurately define and represent social problems while also maximising fundraising success. Discomfort at the use of potentially exploitative images and narratives lay at the heart of this debate. It is not uncommon for those working closely with vulnerable people to be concerned about the use of their clients' personal stories for fundraising purposes. Even where a person is happy to have their experiences shared, it can still make others feel uncomfortable.

The issue for professionals tasked with both accurately depicting the issues around homelessness (or other social issues) and generating sufficient philanthropic sentiment towards those in need, is that a person's decision to make a gift is, above all else, an emotional one. The proof is in the science. Our brains are biologically wired to process the concrete — that is, people, not statistics. People give to people not to organisations or projects. While we understand and value statistics to measure outcomes and success, they may not touch on our emotions enough to make us want to give. Therefore, if you are not targeting donors on an emotional level then you are not raising as much money as you could, and in turn, doing a disservice to those whom your

organisation exists to serve. Research has shown that people donate more when they can identify with one person in need as opposed to reading huge abstract numbers of the overall scope of the problem.¹

People connect with a cause and identify with individuals through storytelling — it is the single most powerful communications tool we have available. Stories make our cause relatable, tangible and touching.² So, how do we tell great stories in a way that does not exploit the hardships experienced by vulnerable client groups within the homelessness sector?

We need to ask ourselves, not only whether a communication strategy 'works' for fundraising, but also whether we are empowering someone by helping them tell their story, rather than objectifying and further marginalising them on a public scale. As charities are often the prime mobilisers of the understanding of many social issues, it is important for our narratives to enhance rather than damage the public's understanding of the issues around homelessness, and their perceived ability to make a difference in the lives of those who are at risk or experiencing homelessness.

One UK study explores the views of young people experiencing homelessness regarding the related images and stories that appeared in major charity campaigns aimed at raising money to fund homelessness services.³ The study found that the young people, insofar as it does not affect the financial bottom line, would prefer the use of storytelling techniques that explain how

recipients come to be in a position of need and how they can turn their lives around. The study discovered that they prefer the use of images and narrative that elicit feelings of empathy rather than merely sympathy, and they hope for marketing that generates a generous response as a result of recognition of common humanity rather than through emotions such as guilt or pity.⁴

Maybe then, the challenge for fundraisers in the sector is to evoke emotion in donors without necessarily centering a campaign message on the most distressing and upsetting aspects of the lives of those we support. It is about artfully weaving positive elements of hope, courage and resilience into the stories we share with our supporters. Compelling, authentic storytelling and providing donors with an insight into the lives of those in which they hope to have an impact is crucial to maximising fundraising success. Being able to do so in a respectful way that protects people's dignity is the key to remaining on the right side of that fine line between telling a good story and exploiting the hardships and adversities of a vulnerable client group.

Endnotes

1. Kogut T and Ritov I 2005, 'The 'identified victim' effect: an identified group, or just a single individual?', *Journal of Behavioural Decision Making*, vol.18, no.3, pp.157–167.
2. Network for Good 2014, *Storytelling for Nonprofits*, Network for Good, Washington DC, (eBook) p.3.
3. Breeze B and Dean J 2012, 'Pictures of me: user views on their representation in homelessness fundraising appeals', *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, vol.17, pp.132–143.
4. *ibid.*

Creating Community: Developing a Group Work Model for Young Women with an Experience of Homelessness

Laura Christie, Brisbane Youth Service Centre for Young Women

In response to a lack of safe spaces for young women to both connect and access supports, Brisbane Youth Service Centre for Young Women has developed a unique group program open to women aged 12 to 25 years who have had an experience of homelessness. With the goal of creating a 'community of intent' this model draws from perspectives, frameworks and approaches such as community cultural development, intersectionality and trauma-informed practice.

Brisbane Youth Service Centre for Young Women (CFYW) works alongside young women aged 12 to 25 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Through a transitional housing program, outreach and centre-based supports, CFYW strives to meet young women 'where they are at' and tailors individual support plans that best suit each young woman's self-identified needs.

Through our support work, we identified that social isolation is a key and recurring theme experienced in varying degrees by all young women accessing our program. As support workers we also acknowledge that social connection is a major link in supporting young women through homelessness and a key element needed for an individual's increased sense of wellbeing and safety. With this knowledge in mind, consultations with young women commenced and paved the way for our group program — Connect, Create and Celebrate...

Connect

Not only connecting young women socially, but connecting them through their shared lived experiences of mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, domestic, family and sexual violence and homelessness.

Create

Creating resources for young women and for the broader community. Allowing space and time to learn new skills and participate in activities such as photography workshops or yoga and mindfulness.

Celebrate:

Working from strength-based and trauma-informed approaches — providing space for women to celebrate individual and collective achievements no matter how great or small.

Collective practice wisdom and extensive group work experience within the team provided us with some direction around 'best practice' group work approaches when working with young people, and in particular young people who have an experience of early trauma and homelessness. This is where the concept of 'purposeful informality' has proved a useful framework for guiding our thinking around creating an appropriate group work space, understanding that more didactic and worker-led approaches can hinder young people from experiencing meaningful connection to facilitated groups.

As suggested by Laguerre,¹ purposeful informality is at its core informality that is purposeful and planned. This approach to working with communities seeks to break down class, ethnicity and gender barriers, transforming members from group participants to meaningful members of an informal community. Purposeful informality appears to benefit young women by allowing them to build relationships within a space that does not impose rigid structures and rules and helps to facilitate relationships that would usually occur in more natural social environments.

This approach also grounds the group informally in the space, works through challenges of group processes and supports the exploration of retaining 'humanness' within groups that are created in organisational spaces.

An example of purposeful informality at work is when the young women attending our group program created their own set of expectations or guidelines outlining what they need from their community here at CFYW to feel safe. They called the document *Creating Community* and their collective expectations are as follows:

- not putting people down
- no judgement
- accepting other people
- don't talk over each other
- what happens in group, or is discussed in group... stays in group!
- respect each other
- openness, honesty and trust
- listening to each other
- participation
- respecting what each woman brings including mood, children, pets etc
- share personal experiences and offer support and safety
- don't leave people out — belonging
- acceptance and inclusion
- enjoy yourself!
- hope, faith and encouragement.

This approach is also illustrated in the following case study that describes one young woman's experience of connecting in with group work here at CFYW.

Jacinta's* story

Jacinta, a young woman in her early 20s, first connected with CFYW to gain support around her experience of domestic violence, poor mental health including self-harming

behaviours and a significant eating issue. Jacinta has experienced early complex trauma and abuse, and has spent much of her young adult life in and out of hospital mental health wards. Jacinta shared with her CFYW worker that she often felt socially isolated and without friends.

With the support of her worker, Jacinta was introduced to the Connect, Create and Celebrate group. Initially Jacinta sat on the periphery of group, quietly colouring in mindfulness mandalas and sitting alone. In line with the concept of 'purposeful informality', group work at CFYW allows group members the time and space they need to enter the group at their own pace. Over a short period of time however Jacinta's engagement in the group began to shift.

We noticed that Jacinta began to join conversations with other young women and participate in activities such as photography workshops and a picnic in the park. An important part of creating community is feeling a sense of belonging and trust and this was highlighted when Jacinta started sharing her own values, beliefs and ideas around the oppression and discrimination that can occur within society. As a result of Jacinta's connection to the group, friendships developed that continued outside the CFYW context.

These friendships provided support to Jacinta during times of hospital admissions and more broadly on nights out, weekends away and other 'usual' social activities that young people engage in.

Over the past six months' many different young women have attended group; this aligns with the transient nature of youth homelessness and highlights the importance of flexible service delivery that allows young women to enter and exit the group as they please. By providing a regular and ongoing safe place for young women to connect, Jacinta reports feeling secure attending the group regardless of what group members are in attendance.

Centre for Young Women also borrows from the multifaceted approach of 'Learning by Observing and Pitching In' (LOPI).² Our group

work draws on the facets of LOPI in the following ways:

Community organisation of learning

Young women play a pivotal role in group development, preparation and evaluation. Young women are welcomed in and provided with opportunities to contribute according to their interests and skills. Space and time is taken to reflect on what the group collectively and individually needs.

Motive

The inclusive nature of group processes mean that young women feel valued, open to contributing and wanting to belong.

Collaboration and flexibility

Purposeful informality encourages blending of ideas and values. Young women are invited to participate and direct the group at a level they feel comfortable. Creating community within the group setting encourages collaborative engagement. With flexible boundaries and 'leadership', young women walk alongside each other in group processes.

Goals / transformational participation

Transformational learning, increased skills in empathy, responsibility and valuing contribution leads to an increased sense of belonging. There is a dual focus on contributing and belonging to the group community as well as gaining information and skills.

Learning

Young women share lived experiences and peer support is interwoven with a critical analysis of wider social systems. The group makes connection to the 'personal is political' and this process is facilitated organically by young women and group workers.

Communication

Communication is recurring theme in the group's *Creating Community* document. Communication is also created through shared narratives. Through this building of shared language young women are encouraged to take 'leadership' roles within the group.

Assessment

Assessment focuses on an evaluation of the support provided. Evaluation is collected through ongoing informal

feedback, revisiting creating community document and vision boarding.

Through Participatory Action Learning and evaluation processes young women were supported to identify the kinds of outcomes they hoped for the group. *Vision boards* were utilised to capture these outcomes and young women articulated and expanded upon the following themes:

- friendship
- connection
- learning
- support
- fun.

After each group session, young women were invited to add to the visions boards a small reflection, picture, word or statement that captured what they gained from group that week. They then added their reflections underneath the appropriate theme. For example, on the 'Connection' board women have posted reflections such as 'embracing each other's company', 'acceptance and acknowledging each other's feelings' and 'connection through mutual personal experiences'.

These themes are revisited every few weeks or as group members change to ensure that the outcomes still fit with the hopes of the group.

Group work and 'creating community' is a fluid, ongoing and vibrant process. The needs of a group of people are ever-changing and shifting and so consistent assessment and evaluation is needed to ensure cohesion and meaningful participation for all members. This responsibility should not lie solely with group facilitators or workers, but with the group community as a whole. If there is a meaningful sense of belonging and engagement, then this should occur almost organically and hopefully young women can carry this experience of having positive connection with them into their lives and into their experiences in the broader community.

* Not her real name

Endnotes

1. Laguerre M 1994, *The Informal City*, Palgrave Macmillan, pp.18–19
2. Rogoff B 2014, *Learning by Observing and Pitching In to family and community endeavours: An orientation, Human Development*, no.57, pp.69–81.

Using Art Therapy as a Tool for Relationship Management in Supported Residential Settings for Homeless Young People

Kristin Penhaligon and Tara Harriden, Brisbane Youth Service

A large proportion of the work in a residential supported accommodation program, is working with young people to get them ready to live independently. The young people have spent varying amounts of time in different stages of homelessness and many have a history of trauma, abuse, neglect, mental health issues (either theirs or their parents'), substance use (theirs or their parents') etc. As we cater for young people of all genders between 15 and 18 years, there are different levels of emotional/mental maturity, communication skills, intellectual abilities etc. Having to meet new people, make friends and integrate into an unfamiliar living environment can be quite a daunting prospect for some young people.

Young people who find themselves in supported accommodation, with a youth worker present 24–7, often feel as though they have little control and have been thrown into a space where they have to live with people with whom they have nothing in common, except their experiences of homelessness.

Young people start on their journey with us, learning the skills for starting and maintaining relationships, meeting people, initiating and continuing conversations and showing a general interest and consideration for others when living in a shared space together. All of these factors can contribute to whether relationships and/or the dynamic in the house, flourish or not. Due to the transient nature of young people accessing our programs, young

people who stay here for longer periods of time, or are repeat service users, may have to meet and learn to get on with a number of varying personalities throughout their stay.

We have been applying art therapy methods at various stages of our young people's stays with us to build and enhance relationships — between the young people living in the house as well as between our young people and our youth workers. Art therapy is the use of art-making as a communication tool in settings mediated by a professional art therapist and it has developed substantially since its early days in the 1940s. Art Therapy has been shown to be an effective tool in the prevention and treatment of mental ill-health with many different applications for enhancing wellbeing and self-esteem.



Brisbane street art

There is ever-growing neuroscientific evidence to support claims that art therapy can improve cognitive and social functioning for children, young people and adults alike. There is much research to support early theories that art-making increases cognitive capacity, positive affect and feelings of self-efficacy,¹ lowers feelings of anger² and even promotes self-control. In our residential setting we have observed an ongoing level of interest in generalised art presenting the question... would art therapy be a useful tool in relationship management?

Many of our young people do not have experiences of following rules, or sharing — they are quite independent and forthright and yet many of them do have experience of being protective of others, so can actually be quite supportive of one another when given opportunities to do so. We have found art therapy is very useful in residential care settings as it can be used for everything from teaching and practising relaxation skills, to goal setting, to behaviour and relationships management, and can be applied to working on issues with individuals and/or groups. Once the art-making is complete, having an artefact to talk about often aids people in group settings and in one-to-one situations, to talk more openly about their feelings or matters affecting them by discussing the creative piece and its symbolism — whether it is a drawing, sculpture, photograph or any other type of

creative work — rather than talking directly about themselves.

With all this in mind, we recently offered an art therapy session where residents from three different supported accommodation programs could meet to participate in Coptic Book-Binding. Art therapy activities can provide a non-threatening opportunity for young people to get to know about one another and their youth workers, and to begin to discover commonalities that will move them toward feeling a sense of belonging and connection.

Participation in art can aid communication by reducing the awkwardness of conversations with others through providing a third entity in the conversation for people to focus on. For example, sometimes young people are able to focus on the art materials and process, thus avoiding the intensity of eye contact, for example, while discussing sensitive issues. As the two groups of young people had not met previously, one of the aims of Coptic Book Binding art therapy activity was for the young people to begin building relationships with one another.

All young people required some one-to-one assistance from the art therapist, and this attention helped to build self-esteem. Book-binding is not easy, so most people had to ask for help from one another at some stage of the process — this is also an important skill for our young people

to practice: asking for help and support when you need it. Young people from two of our three residential supported accommodation programs attended this book-binding workshop, with all participants completing the activity taking three hours in total, to complete a finished piece of work.

While art therapy usually privileges the process over the product, in the book-binding workshop, one of the aims was for each of the young people to leave with a journal they had each made for themselves. The book-binding activity was chosen particularly because it would end with a definite product which meant they were able to feel a sense of accomplishment and pride in having made their own book. They will feel this sense of pride each time they write in their book, or show it to another person.

Art therapy is currently being utilised on a one to one basis with residents, as part of our evaluation processes to help capture most significant change stories, and in case reviews and group work. The goal is:

- voluntary participation
- engagement in the processes (with each other and the worker)
- following key instructions/directions
- complete a finishing a piece of art
- reflective on their experience of the process/finished product
- observing the dynamics between resident in a group setting.

The inclusion of art therapy into our residential program assists young people with their emotional regulation and encourages deeper reflective skills. We will continue to trial the use of various modalities of art therapy to support ongoing relationship management and youth participation to inform and enhance our service delivery response.

Endnotes

1. Kaimal G and Ray K 2017, Free art-making in an art therapy open studio: changes in affect and self-efficacy, *Arts and Health An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, vol.9, no.2, pp.154–156. doi: 10.1080/17533015.2016.1217248
2. Walsh D 2012, A sense-able approach to art therapy: promoting engagement for a child with developmental difficulties, *ANZJAT: Australian and New Zealand Journal of Arts Therapy*, vol.7, no.1, pp.26–41.



Brisbane street art

Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness in Northgate

Laura Holdstock, Service Coordinator, The Lodge Youth Support Service Inc.

Youth homelessness services have an unparalleled opportunity to engage with clients during a pivotal period of growth and personal development. The type of contact young people have with support services during this time can significantly impact whether or not a young person is equipped to successfully transition into independent living. This is the belief of The Lodge Youth Support Service Inc, a youth shelter in Northgate, Queensland.

The Lodge is a not-for-profit organisation providing 24-hour supported care for young homeless and at-risk young people aged 16 to 25 and has been providing services to young people experiencing homelessness since 1972. The Lodge accommodates up to four young

people at any time within its main, suburban home setting, with an additional single bedroom unit available for one young person.

The service is committed to providing a nurturing environment that fosters a sense of belonging and assists young people in their personal development, while facilitating their participation in activities through which the skills and resources for independent living can be acquired.

Young people at The Lodge are encouraged to participate in a range of activities both at the service and in the community, focusing on building skills in areas including cooking, nutrition, physical recreation, budgeting, managing relationships and time management. The program

is supplemented by regular individual case management sessions in which young people are encouraged to identify personal goals regarding issues such as mental health, education and employment and are then supported by youth workers to achieve these.

The Lodge has proven to yield positive results when it comes to breaking the cycle of homelessness by focusing on personal development and building living skills, with six out of eight residents moving on to independent accommodation in the last financial year. Additionally, many past residents continue to seek and receive support from the service after their departure from the service, with follow-up case management occurring on a needs basis.



On the streets of Brisbane during 500 Lives 500 Homes Campaign Registry Fortnight.

Photo: Jo Bennett

Case Study: Tabetha

Tabetha was referred to the service by her high school at age sixteen after running away from an inappropriate home environment. She and her family had moved residences a total of 43 times in her lifetime, her mother frequently absent for long periods of time, leaving Tabetha responsible for caring for her younger brothers and as a result unable to attend school.

Speaking of her arrival at The Lodge, she explains the realisation of what little she had — with no savings, no job and only the essential belongings she was able to retrieve from her family home. She identified that she had only learned the basic skills to survive and care for her siblings, cooked and ate mostly frozen meals, and had limited knowledge when it came to tasks such as cleaning, budgeting and making appointments.

Tabetha immersed herself fully in life at The Lodge, learning how to successfully complete these tasks and positively engaging in the social side of the service. She explains the opportunity to engage in recreational activities every weekend was particularly favourable given her lack of opportunity to do this previously. Like many residents, she describes the social aspect of 'The Lodge family' as invaluable to her experience, knowing support and even just someone to talk to is always close by.

Tabetha resided at The Lodge for 12 months, during which time she successfully graduated from The Lodge's living skills program and graduated Year 12. Tabetha then transitioned into The Lodge's one-bedroom unit in the nearby suburb of Nundah, where she was able to put her newly acquired living skills into practice while still receiving the support of The Lodge. During her time with The Lodge, Tabetha acquired part-time employment at a popular tourist attraction and commenced a double degree in Forensic Science and Criminology at Griffith University. After a successful six-month lease in the unit, Tabetha was supported to secure a private rental house-share where she currently resides.

Today, Tabetha is still in contact with The Lodge, has volunteered her time to help current residents with their



Brisbane street art

study and is open about sharing her story about youth homelessness in order to raise awareness of the issue. As she explains, 'home isn't where your family is, it's where you make it,' and having moved home more than 40 times, The Lodge and its structured program provided her with the normality that ended the whiplash she experienced from a life of constant, uncertain change.

Kelsha's Story

Growing up I moved from school to school and never really settled in. After a family breakdown I found myself homeless for the first time at 12 and since then I have slept on the street, in parks, with friends, at shelters and on and off with my father over the past five years. I am now nearly 18 years old.

Being so young and sleeping on the streets and in parks means you never knew when something bad could happen. I have had my belongings stolen; I have been threatened and on many occasions have seen violence. I was always at risk of being unsafe. This is how I and many other young people have to live. Thankfully I was able to create my own family on the streets, people who looked out for me, provided me food and kept me safe.

After losing most of my connections with my community, friends and education I found myself trying

marijuana at the age of 13 and then moved on to stronger substances.

In January 2017 while on the streets in Brisbane I met another young person and he linked me into Brisbane Youth Service. At the time I wasn't well physically and mentally. I felt like my body had been in the wars and I was ready to make some changes.

Brisbane Youth Service has supported me with my mental health, housing, physical health, harm reduction, education and so many other things in the seven months I have been linked in here.

They gave me a chance in Windsor house, I stayed there for around two months and I loved it. It felt like I had a home again and this is a feeling I hadn't felt in such a long time. It felt so good. I had somewhere to go, I had food to eat, a shower and a bed which was for me. After a short time at Windsor house I made amazing friends and wanted to start sorting my education. Brisbane Youth Service helped me enroll into school and since then I have been going well and am looking to graduate this year.

Since January I have come a long way. I have recently secured a one-bedroom apartment and I am working on becoming fully independent. I am determined to stay focused on my goals and completing my education which will lead me into creating a stable a strong career for myself.

D: Domestic and Family Violence

'Now it's my time' of Being an Expert in One's Own Life

Leanne Wood, Research, Social Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Anglicare Southern Queensland
with Carol Birrell, Service Manager, Homelessness Services Women and Families, Anglicare Southern Queensland

Among the responses in a recent Anglicare survey of 'youth voices'¹ was a blunt comment from a young woman called 'Jess'.

'Couches', she wrote, 'are not a long-term living arrangement'.

Embedded in the story she shared of experiencing homelessness were familiar themes of isolation, anxiety and lack of dignity — having *'nowhere else to go'* but being *'allowed to stay a few more days out of pity'*.

Jess's story is clearly not unique. On any night of any week, an estimated 4,000 women are homeless in Brisbane. The unmet demand from women and children fleeing a range of challenges including domestic violence, family breakdown, transitioning from prison or a mental health unit, drug misuse, loss of tenancy, couch surfing, and homelessness is overwhelming.

As part of our commitment to addressing this need, Anglicare Southern Queensland has

substantially expanded our Homelessness Services Women and Families (HSWF) programs over the past couple of years. The 2015–2016 financial year marked the first full year of operation for our new \$6.4 million Adult Women's Program, which offers temporary supported accommodation for single women; and our Young Women and Children program, which provides temporary supported accommodation for pregnant or parenting young mothers with children under four years of age. Residents maintain their



Photo provided by Anglicare Southern Queensland



Photo provided by Anglicare Southern Queensland

independence while being supported by 24-hour staffing arrangements.

The new premises nearly double capacity across Brisbane's metropolitan area. The fit out of the 24 rooms became a community initiative, drawing teams from businesses, schools and the wider community to design and decorate welcoming sanctuaries for the residents that are a natural consequence of our belief in the inherent worth and uniqueness of each woman, and her right to quality accommodation and service provision.

The new building also includes spacious community areas and meeting rooms designed to support a holistic, wrap-round model of service. Based on Housing First principles, the premises ensure that the women's basic need for safety is met. In that safe environment, we are then able to address, in partnership with the women, the underlying factors that may have contributed to their experiences of homelessness and attend to more in-depth, therapeutic needs.

*The Road Home: A National Policy for Ending Homelessness*² highlighted some of the diverse causes of homelessness and the cyclic pattern that sees adults and children who are experiencing homeless become further at risk of poor physical and mental health, disrupted education or high unemployment, exposure to violence, higher rates of imprisonment and a loss of stability and connection

in their lives. Hamilton et al³ write about such multiple, interacting causes and contextual factors as creating a 'web of vulnerability', where risk factors interplay and accumulate over time to result in homelessness. Other studies indicate the negative impact of cumulative trauma and adversity on people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.⁴

Based on this kind of evidence, HSWF has adopted a trauma informed/recovery oriented framework to guide our model of service.

Trauma-informed practice is, as the term implies, where workers are sensitive to the impacts that trauma has on a person's psychological, physical and emotional self; and adapt their practice to cater for such impacts. Trauma is often experienced as disempowering, a lack of safety and control over one's own life; and so individuals' responses to crisis and their adapted coping skills (which might include self-harming or suicidal behaviours, substance misuse, unhealthy relationships, and/or aggressive and unsafe behaviours) make sense in this context.

The core of trauma-informed practice is establishing a sense of safety, so that the women who use our services can address the other issues impacting on their wellbeing. Ensuring that the environment is physically safe, and that our interactions with the women and their children are welcoming, consistent

and reliable, aims to build a sense of emotional safety and trust, and reduces the possibilities of re-traumatisation. We believe that healing happens in positive relationships and recognise the importance of community and connection; but also strongly support the women's right to control, choice and autonomy over their own lives.

This belief is also consistent with a second element of our service model, recovery-oriented practice, which is underpinned by the conviction that people have the capacity to make their own choices about their recovery and wellbeing. Our workers support the women to build on their unique skills and strengths to explore opportunities, and make real and informed choices about what they would like to achieve: they are the experts in their own lives.

Voluntary feedback from some of the women who have transitioned from HSWF into long-term housing suggests that the trauma-informed/recovery-oriented approach is helping individuals to reclaim their lives. In the 2016–2017 FY, 73 per cent of residents successfully transitioned into the next stage of longer-term accommodation; and their exit feedback was typified by words such as courage, reassurance, motivation, support and respect.

As one excited resident noted, despite her nerves at moving on: *'Now it's my time. I need to move on so other people can be helped by Anglicare.'*

Endnotes

1. More information on the Youth Voices project can be found at: anglicaresq.org.au/youth-voices
2. Commonwealth of Australia 2008, *The Road Home: A National Policy for Ending Homelessness*, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, apo.org.au/node/2882
3. Hamilton A B, Poza I and Washington D L 2011, Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-in-Hand': Pathways to Homelessness among Women Veterans, *Women's Health Issues*, vol.21, no.4, Supplement, pp. S203–S209, www.whijournal.com/article/S1049-3867-per cent2811 per cent2900090-9/fulltext
4. Wu N S, Schairer L C, Dellor E and Grella C 2010, Childhood trauma and health outcomes in adults with comorbid substance abuse and mental health disorders, *Addictive Behaviors*, vol.35, pp.68–71.

Intimate Partner Violence and Homelessness: Young Women Lost in the Intersectionality

Rhianon Vichta and Ashleigh Husband, Brisbane Youth Service

While considerable attention has been paid to domestic violence (DV) as a primary cause of homelessness, there has been a historic lack of discourse and awareness across community services systems about the intersectionality of intimate partner violence and homelessness. The commonly used term 'domestic violence' defines intimate partner violence by its occurrence within a 'home' context, rather than situating it within interpersonal relationships, whereas the term 'Intimate Partner Violence' (IPV) is arguably more inclusive of violent experiences that occur outside of the domestic space.

Low visibility of IPV as it occurs outside of the domestic space contributes to a lack of intersectionality which in turn can result in highly vulnerable people, particularly women, being left stranded in the gaps between problem-specific service systems. This issue is further exacerbated for young women, with young women who experience IPV while homeless facing multiple barriers to accessing support from services that lack the resources, capacity and risk-tolerance to respond to the co-occurring concerns. Despite the complexity of this work and the challenge of siloed

problem-driven funding parameters; there is much opportunity to improve intersectional and interagency practice to respond to the mutually compounding vulnerabilities of these challenging issues.

Service Provider Experiences

Witnessing, perpetrating or experiencing violence is a day-to-day reality for young people living on the streets, with young people commonly reporting being physically assaulted, threatened with weapons and robbed.¹ Living in temporary accommodation or sleeping rough elevates risks; and experiences of



Meeting and interviewing people living in Boarding Houses during 500 Lives 500 Homes Campaign Registry Fortnight.

Photo: Robyn McDonald



Brisbane street art

violence may often prolong periods of homelessness. The findings of the 500 Lives 500 Homes homelessness survey of Brisbane showed that almost half (45.5 per cent) had experienced violence since becoming homeless.²

Brisbane Youth Service (BYS), as a holistic youth service provider, has a developing awareness of young people not only being impacted by co-occurring homelessness and IPV, but facing unique systemic and structural barriers to accessing support and safety.

Approximately 55 per cent of the young people accessing BYS each year are currently homeless. While it is important to note that young people frequently under-report experiences of violence during early contact with services; one in four of these young people report that they are currently experiencing either family violence or relationship violence. One quarter of young people acknowledge that they have used violent, threatening or

intimidating behaviours themselves and 40 per cent of young people tell workers, at first assessment, that they want help with violence-related issues.

While there is a strong pattern of violence preceding homelessness (70 per cent of young people accessing BYS report past experiences of violence); BYS sees clear evidence of co-occurring violence and homelessness, with young people who are homeless reporting experiences of relationship violence at significantly higher rates than those living in public, private or family housing situations. Almost 60 per cent of young people reporting current or past relationship violence are currently homeless and 58 per cent of young people who report as homeless also report past or current experiences of relationship violence. While reporting rates are lower overall for current (15 per cent) relationship violence compared with past relationship violence (44 per cent), rates for young people who are homeless are still significantly

disproportionately high compared to rates reported by young people who are in stable housing. Youth workers at BYS report young women are often turned away from both homelessness accommodation services and domestic violence programs. Rejected referrals are often identified as too risky or as falling outside of funded service parameters.

Young Women's Experiences

ABS and IVAWS data shows that young women experience intimate partner violence up to three times the rates of older women.³ Support to prevent longer-term cycles of violence is particularly crucial for younger women; as is awareness that young women are particularly vulnerable to the health and well-being disruptions resulting from homelessness. There are, however, multiple barriers to young women accessing support. Young women report difficulty accessing safe spaces and legal protection mechanisms when one or both parties have no fixed address.

Young women coming to BYS describe unique complexities of IPV during homelessness, including the dichotomous role perpetrators hold as both inflictors of harm and inadvertent protectors from other homelessness related risks. Young women experiencing homelessness describe forming relationships with men who are feared in their communities in order to have protection from other forms of violence such as sexual assault. With IPV experienced by young people who are homeless being often highly recurrent, severe and including acts of significant physical violence such as being beaten, burned or stabbed,⁴ it is critical that the dual issues of safety from violence and safe housing are concurrently addressed.

When sleeping rough, young women report being unable to find safe spaces away from violent partners. Safety during homelessness most often depends on supportive social networks, meaning young people experiencing IPV may be forced to choose between relationship violence and the potential dangers associated with being cut off from their communities of safety. Further, IPV risks extend beyond the immediate homeless experience to be a critical

barrier to young peoples' capacity to move out of homelessness.

IPV impacts the ability to maintain supported accommodation and other tenancies, once attained, due to unauthorised visits by former partners; potential property damage and police involvement; risks to other tenants; as well as the impact of trauma on mental health and capacity for self-care and property maintenance. The mutually reinforcing cycles of homelessness and IPV highlight the critical need for intersectional intervention to concurrently address both issues; so that vulnerable young woman do not continue to fall through gaps between domestic violence, youth accommodation and child safety services. The immense impact of such systems gaps on individual lives cannot be underestimated.

What Can We Do?

It can be accepted that homelessness and youth support workers will frequently witness IPV in both the behaviours and stories of people accessing support. Service providers across all sectors can engage in whole-of-person conversations that overtly recognise the power and control dynamics of IPV in relationships and pro-actively seek to identify co-occurring violence and homelessness concerns.

Service providers have a critical opportunity to consistently maintain a practice culture which not only promotes awareness of the complex dynamics of IPV, but which directly challenges and holds young people accountable for the unacceptability of violent and controlling behaviours. A strengths-based perspective will see workers acting from the belief that people have the power to change their use of violence in relationships. While frequent exposure to violence puts workers at risk of becoming desensitised to IPV and thus complicit in normalising violence, organisational training and reflective practice opportunities can ensure that cognisance of the complexity, risks and impact of IPV underpin service delivery frameworks and practices.

A trauma-informed practice approach provides a strong foundation for workers supporting young people experiencing and

using violence.⁵ Given the importance of intervening to break cycles of violence early, even when young people using violence have been victims of violence in their own lives, workers should be skilled in holding empathy and engagement with the young person using violence without excusing their behaviour. With consideration of potential safety risks, organisations can adopt targeted practices, including:

- routinely conducting separate assessments for couples presenting together
- ensuring adequate internal communication mechanisms are in place around violence risks
- prioritising separate engagement with both people who are experiencing violence and those who perpetrate it
- proactive psychoeducation programs around healthy relationships
- strategically developing collaborative interagency relationships between youth, violence and homelessness services.

Greater awareness of IPV and homelessness needs to provoke strengthening of intersectional policy and cross-sector service responses. Policy and practice frameworks that fail to recognise and accommodate this intersectionality not only falsely segment the complexity of vulnerable young people's experiences; they can compromise the quality of service and outcomes from well-intentioned service delivery agencies.

Strategic interagency collaboration can enhance service capacity to respond to the co-occurring issues and thus avoid or reduce incidences of young women being bounced between homelessness and violence services. Cross-cutting the theme of interagency collaboration is the principle of bringing violence-related services to the spaces occupied by young people who are experiencing or at risk of homeless. Targeted IPV awareness interventions within homelessness services; as well as expansion of pro-active outreach and street-based services may build opportunities for service connection with young people for whom controlling violent relationships limit their capacity to independently access support.

The importance of focussing on both interagency collaboration or 'joined-up' practice, and collective impact in both homelessness and violence services is widely recognised.⁶ Developing collaborative interagency responses is consistent with both the *'The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness'* goal of improving and expanding services and with *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*.^{7,8} Specialised research is needed to better understand and contextually respond to the reciprocally compounding complexity of IPV and youth homelessness, recognising that the risks and complexity is often greater than the sum of the parts. With awareness and enhanced sector capacity, we can develop specialist responses that more effectively meet the needs of highly vulnerable young women.

Endnotes

1. Jordan L 2012, Spaces of trauma: young people, homelessness and violence, *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.31, no.3, pp.11–17.
2. 500 lives 500 homes 2014, *Emerging Trends VI-SPDAT Youth*, retrieved from: http://www.500lives500homes.org.au/resource_files/500lives/500-Lives-Youth-Factsheet.pdf
3. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness*. Retrieved from: <http://abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Main+per+cent20+Features22011>
4. Boris N W, Heller S S, Sheperd T and Zeanah C H 2002, Partner violence among homeless young adults: Measurement issues and associations, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol.30, no.5, pp.355–363.
5. Blue Knot Foundation 2012, *Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery*, retrieved from: <http://www.blueknot.org.au/ABOUT-US/Our-Documents/Practice-Guidelines>
6. Crane P and Livock C 2012, Joined-up practice: five areas of exemplary practice for social workers and educators to re-engage homeless youth, *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.31, no.2, pp.44–52.
7. Commonwealth of Australia 2008, *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, retrieved from <http://www.homelesshub.ca/resource/road-home-national-approach-reducing-homelessness-australia>
8. Council of Australian Governments 2011, *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, retrieved from: http://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/national_plan.pdf

'Homelessness is not who I am, it doesn't define me as a person or a mother, it is not my identity'

Deb Blakeney, In-Place (Nambour, Queensland)

Supporting women who have experienced domestic and family violence is complex, not only because of the impact violence and trauma has on someone, but because the supports needed often involve timely and responsive access to a wide range of agencies and systems.

The following case study provided us with an opportunity to outline some of the issues and strategies commonly faced by women and children seeking support from our service. This is by no means a comprehensive outline, but rather a way of presenting the importance of ongoing attention to the multi-faceted role and engagement of specialist support services such as In-Place with people experiencing homelessness, and the diversity of services and systems that have a role to play in pro-actively seeking positive and equitable outcomes.

About Rachel

Rachel (not her actual name) self-referred to a regional Queensland domestic and family violence shelter via the service. She fled to escape violence perpetrated by the father of her three children, and had been homeless for the past year, mostly living in her car. The children remained in the care of their father. Rachel was also experiencing further violence by a new partner.

During the initial engagement with, and assessment of Rachel's situation by shelter workers, it is apparent that Rachel has a strong commitment to her children, an engaging sense of humour, and has survived significant sustained hardship and trauma. As Rachel's situation is explored with her, a range of complex personal, situational and systemic issues become apparent that limit her housing options. These are:

Financial stress

Rachel is currently on Newstart payment with a high level of debts, and is ineligible for the Disability Support Pension whilst her medical diagnosis is pending. Her low income reduces her access to required medical and mental health supports and required medications/equipment.

Physical health issues

These include a heart condition, migraines and regular falls/fainting. The falls/ fainting have resulted in regular hospital admissions in recent months, with significant diagnostic medical investigations through the public health system still ongoing. Her medical conditions mean she is unable to drive, which in turn limits her daily living including shopping, access to relevant appointments and contact with her children.

Experiences of gendered trauma, violence and abuse

Rachel has experienced sexual and emotional abuse from an early age. As a child she was sexually abused by a step-father, though this did not result in statutory child protection intervention, nor was it addressed through the legal system. Much has occurred since then Rachel says. At present her ex-partner continues to exhibit controlling and coercive behaviours in relation to contact with the children.

High level mental health issues and illness

These include multiple diagnoses and multiple hospital admissions for assessment and treatment. Rachel's homelessness has significantly contributed to a lack of consistency and access to health care.

Responding to Rachel

Case management support was provided to Rachel by a social work trained Key Worker, utilising a trauma

informed and recovery based framework for practice. Goal planning with Rachel identified a cluster of support activities as needed. Whilst these all are inter-related, to some extent the non-housing aspects of working with Rachel are experiences of:

Gendered trauma, sexual assault and abuse

- Trauma counselling and support for domestic and family violence experienced.
- Linking Rachel to ongoing specialist support services in the community. This included advocacy and liaison with specialist legal supports and legal aid for representation in relation to property and child related matters.
- Community inclusion support for Rachel to participate in activities that she identified would be useful for her recovery.

Health

- Safety planning with Rachel identifying management of mental health concerns, including development of personal strategies and the provision of appropriate linkages to specialist services and supports. This included on-call arrangements provided to address safety/risk needs presenting in relation to physical and mental health concerns.
- Access to supportive clinical health services including a regular GP and clinical psychologist for primary health and mental health concerns.
- Advocacy with health care providers to ensure safety concerns around steps in unit at the shelter were addressed, including Vital Call.
- Ongoing assessment of mental health, and referral to community

mental health specialists and non-government mental health providers.

Finances

- Emergency relief provided in relation to urgent food, medical and transport needs allowing enhanced access to medical and mental health supports, whilst other service arrangements with community transport and health providers were also put in place.
- Advocacy regarding Centrelink payments — applying for Crisis Payment, Disability Support Pension, and gathering evidence for Centrelink to meet eligibility requirements.
- Assistance from a range of funding sources to help Rachel move from shelter to permanent housing, including assistance with removal costs, and furnishing of her new house with essential items.

Responding to Complexity

A number of collaborative processes were necessary at both our Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) and between the service and other agencies/systems to adequately acknowledge complexities and explore options. These were the use of a team management approach at the shelter to support Rachel's complex behaviours, and management of duty of care to other residents, and a high-level case co-ordination approach with other service providers to maximise how the various services and systems provided coherent and consistent care to Rachel. The use of a case co-ordination approach, avoided counter-productive duplication in case management, and contributed to future goal planning with Rachel that she experienced as appreciative, complementary and clear and which placed her at the centre of her own future planning.

Housing

Engagement with Rachel about the transition to permanent housing started early on in our support of her, reflecting her own clear desire for somewhere safe and accessible for herself and her children. The SHS shelter provided a place for this to be negotiated from over an established period of time, for responses to key areas of need to be developed, and for new supports to be embedded. In

respect of housing, liaison and high-level communication with the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works (DHPW) was central. Features of this engagement were:

Early regional liaison between the Specialist Homelessness Service and Contract Officer/Principal Contract Officer, Housing and Homelessness Services, Central Queensland and North Coast region at DHPW regarding ongoing safety and risk concerns as well as identification of future housing requirements.

Local liaison between the Specialist Homelessness Service and Maroochydore Housing Service Centre to transition Rachel to appropriate housing that met her medical needs. Application for cooling fans was processed efficiently by DHPW, with involvement of the Occupational Therapist, and consideration given to the complexities of Rachel's circumstances.

High-level of communication was evident between different areas of DHPW to secure an appropriate housing pathway for Rachel.

As the prospect of change of housing and the transition from crisis housing supports were distressing for Rachel, a Request for Absence was granted by DHPW allowing her to transition with high levels of supports in place and a greater sense of personal safety and wellbeing.

The period of time over which the negotiation of housing took place was five months.

Rachel was excited by the prospect of being approved for a house that allowed her to start planning for reunification and ongoing overnight contact with her children.

Outcomes for Rachel

Drawing on feedback from Rachel and observations/data from staff and other agencies, Rachel's situation has been enhanced, and her homelessness addressed through the person-centred case management approach utilised. Contributing features of this are:

- Increased understanding and agency. Rachel has identified that she now has a better understanding of the nature of

domestic and family violence, and the tactics of power and control that were perpetrated in her relationship with her ex-partner. This has enabled Rachel to strategise for her ongoing safety; to start to address the trauma caused by the current violence, and to understand the impact of the violence from previous intimate and family relationships.

- Rachel now has an established safety plan around her mental health that has reduced the frequency of professional mental health input to manage her distress. In turn this has increased Rachel's control and self-reliance, and ability to live independently in the community;
- There is enhanced safety and security for Rachel and her children as a result of strategies developed, and the services to sustain this have been engaged. Rachel is now engaged with Legal Aid support for legal matters, and contact with Rachel's children is recognised as part of this;
- Rachel now has permanent, appropriately located social housing in an area close to schools and transport, as well as to major health facilities;
- Rachel's housing now has appropriate features, in this case cooling modifications as a result of DHPW assessing Rachel's medical needs. Rachel's new housing also has Vital Call established to reduce safety concerns she has and to ensure that she can access medical assistance when needed;
- Appropriate ongoing case coordination and support has been developed to enhance the sustainability of her housing and community. Driven by Rachel, this support will assist her to connect to her new community and maintain established links, as well as continue to plan for physical and mental health safety. The ongoing support is being provided with a mental health lead, together with a plan for the Homestay early intervention service to address indicators when the tenancy might be at risk.
- Clinical governance has been established in relation to Rachel's ongoing mental and physical health needs;
- Rachel is now seeking to engage in training and employment



Artwork provided by In Touch

opportunities in the future. This is something she was not able to envisage when she was first referred to the SHS. Rachel was previously employed in the defence forces prior to becoming a mother, and she says that she has many skills that she would like to build on. Services will be engaged to support this reality into the future;

- Advocacy with Centrelink around DSP eligibility, and liaison with medical and mental health practitioners to gather evidence for need continues.

Conclusions

Without sustained support which appreciates the past trauma and current situation of Rachel, there is little opportunity for her to play an active role in establishing a sustained and safe housing base for her own life and her connection with her children. Chronic homelessness for individuals and families, and intergenerational cycles of homelessness are fuelled through insufficient attention to the complex interplay of personal, situational and systemic factors that face people such as Rachel. Specialist

homelessness services, including those supporting women who have experienced domestic and family violence, have a critical role to play not only in supporting people realise their goal of sustainable safe housing, but in connecting and facilitating between services, localities and social supports in ways that help avoid the disjointed, disengaging and inefficient service delivery that can be experienced without this.

High-level case co-ordination and communication between services, and within services/systems is vital for people with complex needs to transition to, and sustain permanent housing that meets their holistic needs. This high level of support requires specific and additional funding to services as the pull on existing resources is significant and this can be at the detriment of supporting other clients. Team approaches, as well as key worker relationships, are vital to ensure consistent use of evidence based practice approaches that place the person at the centre of managing their own lives and moving towards sustainable independence.

It is vital that issues creating chronic homelessness are appreciated as complex and require a multi-faceted, pro-active and systemic approach over long periods of time, involving a range of service providers and systems in providing early as possible. Honesty, genuine collaboration and transparency are the keys to building relationships, with the person accessing the service, and with other service providers.

Identifying problems early in co-ordination relationships and within the support relationship allows for enhanced navigation of risks and concerns and managing transitions between housing types and locations. Providing a continuum of care, and a 'whatever it takes' approach to a person's individual needs, allows for enhanced housing and support outcomes. Sitting with complexity and going 'outside the box' to meet people where they are at, will allow opportunities for the person's growth, recovery and inclusion.

* Real names have not been utilised for this case study, written consent has been provided by service participant for inPlace to use case management details

Digital Story Project, Council to Homeless Persons Queensland

Deborah Blakeney, President Council to Homeless Persons Queensland (CHPQ)

The Council to Homeless Persons Queensland launched the state Homelessness Week in August 2017, to coincide with Homelessness Week co-ordinated nationally by Homelessness Australia. The purpose of the week was to raise awareness of the experiences of people experiencing homelessness, as well as highlighting the many ways in which communities are actively innovating to address the core structural drivers of homelessness.

As part of this week, CHPQ held a public forum at the Queensland State Library, inviting the community to listen to the journeys of people who have navigated complex systems to achieve stable housing. The narratives were collected from a range of storytellers who had accessed a range of Specialist Homelessness providers in Brisbane. The storytellers, whilst they came from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, and circumstances, held a common belief that they had important messages to convey. The messages were multifaceted, providing significant opportunities for other people experiencing homelessness, to services delivering supports, and to policy makers and governments who make decisions that impact on people who are socially excluded.

The participants in the project also identified that their stories helped to keep hold of the things that were important in their lives and assisted them to stay resilient and maintain hope throughout their experiences.

The service providers who participated, reported that the stories of the people seeking to access supports had a particularly valuable role to play in helping workers, services and funding bodies gain some insight into the experience and

impact of homelessness. The stories were also seen as platform to gain a greater appreciation of what it takes to walk beside people in ways that are trauma safe and respectful of people's dignity and human rights.

The primary themes that were highlighted in the digital stories were very powerful. The themes that were raised in the stories, allowed for a robust and rich discussion in the public forum during Homelessness Week, and the unearthing of myths surrounding people who experience homelessness.

The people who participated in the stories identified the following insights into their circumstances.

Imposed homeless identities

Storytellers highlighted that they felt that the homeless identity was all of 'who they were', and that this identity had been imposed upon them by 'the

system' along their journeys of being homeless. The homeless identity had become a way of defining and shaping their realities. The storytellers also spoke of ways that they had resisted the internalisation of this imposed identity. One participant noted:

'...it's about time those workers ditched the Victorian era with those attitudes and the way of thinking like 'we're just helping out this poor black fella....you feel like you are being made to grovel and beg just to keep your family together and safe.'

Complex system navigation and lack of knowledge of early intervention services and supports

Digital story telling participants shared their stories of not being aware of services and supports, or finding it difficult to navigate the



Deb Blakeney from CHP Qld, and Phil Crane from University of the Sunshine Coast, at the 2017 CHP Qld Homelessness Week event which showcased the digital stories video

service system. Participants spoke about how this complexity impacted on their safety, self-esteem and sense of agency to change their circumstances.

One storyteller recounted an experience that spoke to the profound consequences of this system complexity:

'Without having ever been homeless before, I wasn't aware of any of the services or what was available in terms of resources or monetary assistance to maintain the rent, didn't know it existed. I'd always worked so I probably found myself on the street the week after Christmas and the next 13 months on a bit of journey.'

The taking of 'personal responsibility' and 'need for agency to get out of the situation', rather than a link between the personal and political

Storytellers often focused their narratives on their individual strengths/resilience that they utilised to exit homelessness, encouraging others in similar circumstances to 'pull themselves out' of their situation of homelessness. These comments operate in the context of the significant discourses operating in our society that suggest that the causes of homelessness relate to an individual deficit or something that is inherently 'wrong' with the person, or that the person who is homeless is to blame for their situation. They also sit within a context of the systemic barriers that prevent people from accessing affordable, accessible and safe accommodation.

'I probably could have rung mum and said I haven't got the rent, and I that at that point in my life, because I was in my mid 30's, I realised it was time to take responsibility for my actions or I would never learn, so I didn't appeal for help.'

Desire for full participation/citizenship

In multiple ways, the storytellers spoke of their desire for social inclusion, with an emphasis on being free from discrimination, exclusion from socially valued activities and privileges. Additionally, some

storytellers spoke of their desire to have their experiences recognised as valued knowledge, that could contribute to planning and decision making at the community level. Storytellers desired respect from the community, and the service system and that their voices could be a central part of social development and addressing injustices and breaches of human rights.

Whilst storytellers all spoke to the valuable role that formal services played in the transitioning from homelessness to achieving sustainable housing, some also spoke of the barriers that existed within the service system and what it would take from their perspective to achieve change.

'We need someone to stick by us until we can get our own sustainable housing and we don't always fit into the unrealistic timeframes you give us. We're all individuals living complex lives. We all have different needs, so we can't fit into your neat little service boxes no matter how hard you try. It's not that we don't want or need services, we need you to meet us where we're at. We need people who live in the real world... people who have had their own experiences of homelessness and understand'.

Impact of homelessness on 'spirit' and deficit based approaches to determining eligibility for services

The impact on 'spirit' was a constant theme recounted by the storytellers, as they re-told the personal identity constructions that were shaped by their situation of homelessness.

'from the other side of the looking glass that the people around me were still seeing me, but seeing me I guess in an altered state, in decline, and that I became self-conscious about that, and as you do with heightened self-awareness or self-consciousness, I think like a lot of guys you try to adopt some sort of anonymity. So, when I was in New Farm park for the first few weeks and when I had nowhere else to go and eventually took myself off to the other parks around the city and I guess just sort of disappeared into the

crowd. It suddenly dawned on me that the guys that I was around had been there that long that they couldn't find the way back and I was in danger of going the same way, so it suddenly took on a new urgency.'

Participants also highlighted the deficit-based approaches to being able to access services and supports. The deficit-based approaches within the service system were highlighted as having a detrimental effect on identity construction of the person experiencing homelessness.

'We don't need band aid responses or being pushed from one organisation to the other. It's not helpful, it can actually be spirit breaking'.

Hopefulness for the future, and acts of resistance to exclusion and marginalisation

The storytellers all expressed their individual acts of resistance to their circumstances, which acted as a testament to their own expert knowledge of how to navigate challenges and to navigate systemic barriers. These stories expressed a hopefulness for the future despite the significant trauma that had been a central part of the experience of homelessness.

'I'm now living in a housing commission place. This has been the longest I have ever stayed in one place. I have been happily married now for 28 years and I'm an advocate for the people of the Stolen Generation and I have found a way to help deal with my day to day stressors through doing art.'

'I'm currently a university student studying social work and doing a diploma in counselling. My mission in life is to make something of myself. I'm hoping to get a placement working with people affected by homelessness. I wonder what some of the workers of some of the homelessness services that we have accessed over the years would think of me now. I'm proud of everything my mother has done for our family even when we've had nothing, she has always tried and that to me is the most important thing'.

'I've a lot of skills about how to survive when your homeless, I've had to teach this to other people.'

Intersectionality of disadvantage highlighted as a barrier to addressing homelessness — such as race, class, gender sexuality and ability

Prejudice, discrimination and stigma were identified throughout the stories as structural barriers to achieving change within personal circumstances, particularly as it related to accessing sustainable housing.

As an example, racism was highlighted by one of the participants in the projects as a visible mechanism of white privilege that signified her and her family as the 'other' and which resulted in chronic and intergenerational homelessness.

'People would see that you were black and they would know you were black or boot you out because of the prejudice. Once a fella said to my husband, 'In America we have black scum like your wife 'strung up', my husband told him, 'well you're not in America now'. Looking back, I guess my parents had the same problems with that sort of prejudice as me.'

'My step-father had so many problems towards me because he couldn't accept my sexuality. My father was very abusive towards me, the police had been involved in the circumstances numerous amounts of times and they thought it was in my interests to get out of the situation and into youth accommodation'

'If I could end homelessness, I would take the stigma away for a start, because you just never know if it's going to be you next, you really don't. I'd build people houses, but I'd give people the support when they went into those homes, because sometimes you still got those issues...'

Acknowledgements

CHPQ would like to thank all of the storytellers who participated in the project and acknowledges their strength, resilience and courage.

CHPQ would also like to thank Courtney Hagan (inPlace) for her assistance with this article, particularly in transcribing of the stories.

The stories are available for viewing on the CHPQ website at www.chpq.org.au



Supporting Homeless and Vulnerably Housed Patients: Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital Service Model

Christen Reid, Emergency Department Homeless Liaison Social Worker, Department of Social Work and Psychology, Metro North Hospital and Health Service

The Hospital Emergency Department Homeless Liaison Officer (HEDLO) role is an innovative service model which, since December 2009, has been funded under the Australian National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). HEDLO funding is provided to four South East Queensland hospitals. At each hospital, the HEDLO role implementation is reflective of assessed individual patient and area need. At Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (RBWH), the HEDLO role is an identified social work position which targets individuals experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness. These patients commonly present with complex psychosocial needs that may not be recognised by medical staff. The role of the HEDLO social worker is to identify and respond to these patients' psychosocial needs and provide support during their Emergency Department presentation.

The RBWH HEDLO social worker is available to patients of the Emergency Trauma Centre (ETC), the Psychiatric Emergency Centre and the Short Stay Unit between 7am and 3:30pm weekdays. Outside of these hours, the ETC is staffed by RBWH social workers who are available 24 hours a day. However, the ETC social work service can provide only a limited service to this patient group because of competing priorities.

The HEDLO project is funded to service 430 patients across the four hospital sites per year. Notably, the RBWH HEDLO social worker far exceeded this figure by providing a service to 518 patients during the 2016/2017 financial year. This figure excludes patients who are homeless as a result of domestic violence as the ETC social workers have primary responsibility for service provision to this group.

Prioritising early identification

The HEDLO social worker prioritises early identification of homeless or vulnerably housed patients during their Emergency Department presentation. Each morning, the social worker scans the ETC waiting room and talks to medical staff to identify patients who may require the HEDLO service. Reviews of patients' recorded addresses and current presentation notes are then conducted to identify those patients with no fixed address or who may be residing in unstable accommodation. Data for the 2016–2017 financial year revealed that 37 per cent of HEDLO referrals were generated as a result of the HEDLO early identification screening process. In turn, early identification enables rapid commencement of service provision and discharge planning with these patients to address their specific psychosocial needs.

Upon initial engagement with a patient, the social worker completes a psychosocial assessment with a primary focus on supportive and appropriate discharge planning. Pivotal to the social worker's framework for practice is the Housing First principle, which focuses on securing stable accommodation upon discharge from hospital and linking patients in with support services to assist with identified stressors and tenancy support. Over the past 12 months, the HEDLO social worker secured accommodation for 69 per cent of patients who did not require hospitalisation. Given the limited accommodation options for patients with multiple complex needs, this represents a notable achievement.

Ongoing challenges to addressing homelessness include limited crisis and affordable housing, lack of

finances, and difficulties with producing identification. These challenges are likely to be more formidable for patients with complex health and social needs. An ongoing concern is the inability to find suitable accommodation for a significant proportion of these patients. Over the past 12 months, this represented 16 per cent of HEDLO patients. These patients were assessed as not requiring hospitalisation and were discharged to no fixed address. A further 15 per cent of patients were discharged to an unknown location, due to factors such as declining support or leaving before treatment was completed.

Liaison Service and Partnerships

The HEDLO social worker delivers in-service training and offers a consultation service to RBWH staff regarding inpatients who are homeless and require support for discharge planning and continuity of care. Persons experiencing homelessness are significantly over-represented in the hospital population and homelessness is an identified barrier to discharge. Feedback from staff indicates that this specialist liaison service has reduced social barriers to discharge and ensured expedited supportive transition to accommodation.

An integral part of the HEDLO role is forging strong partnerships with government and community partners. The HEDLO social worker regularly attends community homelessness forums and liaises with support services to improve referral pathways. This enables patients to be rapidly referred or re-linked with case management/support services upon discharge.



Interviewing people during 500 Lives 500 Homes Campaign Registry Fortnight.

Photo: Linda Kaufman.

Murray's story

The HEDLO social worker works in a time-pressured environment where same day discharge is given high priority. However, Murray's story exemplifies the need for protracted engagement with patients who present with multiple complex issues.

Murray suddenly relocated to Brisbane from interstate and immediately presented to RBWH to seek mental health treatment and accommodation as he had no fixed address. In addition to homelessness, the HEDLO social worker identified a range of complex issues including a significant mental health history requiring medication, a history of offending behaviour, and previous involvement with the criminal justice system. Murray had no form of identification and described a long history of interstate transience. He reported that his funds were managed by an interstate Public Trustee Office and it became

apparent that he would require supported accommodation due to his inability to self-manage care.

With Murray's consent, the social worker obtained collateral information from the interstate services that were previously engaged with him. These discussions revealed that Murray was required to report his relocation to the Queensland Police Service to avoid re-incarceration. Of further concern, the Public Trustee advised they were unaware of Murray's interstate relocation and Murray was continuing to pay for his now-abandoned accommodation.

In collaboration with Murray and these agencies, the HEDLO social worker was able to:

- secure same day supported accommodation
- arrange transport to his new accommodation

- ensure the Public Trustee re-directed his rental payments
- work with Murray to identify strategies to address his tendency to relocate on impulse
- schedule an appointment for Murray with Queensland Police Service to verify his new address to comply with reporting requirements
- refer Murray to various specialist services for ongoing mental health, tenancy and social support

The Link Between Housing and Health

The HEDLO social worker provides an essential service within the inner Brisbane City to RBWH patients who are in crisis, homeless or vulnerably housed. Early intervention, timely discharge planning and forging links with community supports are crucial to securing stable accommodation for these patients. This in turn is a prerequisite for positive patient health and social outcomes.

Integrated Mental Health Approach Sustains Tenancies

Department of Housing and Public Works

The Mental Health Demonstration Project

A prevention and early intervention approach, being tested in North Brisbane, is having remarkable success assisting public housing tenants, with mental health concerns, to sustain their tenancies.

Tenants living with mental health issues and complex needs can experience significant housing instability and high rates of homelessness. This can cause further deterioration of mental and physical health, frequently resulting in repeated use of health and crisis services, ongoing homelessness, mental health placements, arrest, and incarceration.¹

In 2015, the Queensland Mental Health Commission (the Commission) released the *Social Housing Systemic Issues for Tenants with Complex Needs* report that recommended better integration of programs,

policies, and service responses across government to help tenants receive more integrated and coordinated support to sustain their tenancies.

The Commission called for local service delivery networks to collaborate to improve their ability to deliver more effective client outcomes and improve social housing tenants' access to the housing and support services they need to sustain their tenancies. As a result, the Mental Health Demonstration Project (the project) was created as a joint initiative of the Department of Housing and Public Works (the department) and Queensland Health.

The project was funded to be implemented from 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2017, in the Chermside and Fortitude Valley Housing Service Centres catchment areas. The project is underpinned by the principle that tenants experiencing mental health or wellbeing issues be treated fairly and

respectfully and receive support to address the resultant behaviour that may jeopardise their ability to sustain their tenancies.

Tenants participating in the program have access to assessment, support and assistance, such as clinical mental health, in-home tenancy supports and links to other services. With their permission, their personal information is shared across the agencies and local support networks, allowing more accurate and holistic assessments of individual's needs. The average duration of support that tenants received was approximately seven months.

Participants help to develop a tailored, integrated case-management plan to provide strategies that can help them manage complex issues like hoarding and squalor, social isolation, poor mental and physical health, failure to maintain their property and strained neighbourhood relationships.

There are a variety of roles involved in the project, including a Housing Service Integration Coordinator who leads and supports interagency collaboration, a project team that provides ongoing assistance from assessment to exit and regular check-ins once the client has completed the program.

Between 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2017, 195 participants were accepted into the project, including 'Mitch'. After sleeping rough on the Brisbane streets on and off for over ten years, Mitch finally found a home in a one-bedroom unit managed by the department. Three months later, it became clear to staff that Mitch was struggling to maintain his tenancy, with neighbours complaining about his behaviour.



Brisbane street art

Mitch had minimal furniture and was not paying bills, keeping his unit clean or washing his clothes. He had poor eyesight, was drinking excessively and eating poorly. Mitch told staff he had three children who lived with their mother but he had no contact with them.

Staff referred Mitch to the project where he met with the Housing Service Integration Coordinator and project team to discuss his issues, identify his goals and develop a tenancy support plan. Mitch's goals included having a fully furnished, child-safe unit, improving his sight if possible, managing his money to pay bills and save, learning to cook healthy meals, accessing a low cost counselling service and finding work.

Over the four months, Mitch received clinical mental health support from Queensland Health, psycho-social support from Footprints in Brisbane and funding to purchase additional support and specialist services. Staff provided in-home visits to work on his budgeting and helped him set up a

system to pay bills on-time which reduced his debts. He bought a washing machine, fridge and other furnishings, and liaised with the department to arrange floor coverings for his unit. He also saw an optometrist for his sight issues and received new glasses.

Mitch undertook cooking lessons and learnt successful grocery shopping strategies. This has helped him become more confident about preparing and cooking varied and healthy meals. He has regularly attended a counselling service and is considering going to a local 'Single Dads' group for peer support. Mitch has engaged with Centrelink and is hoping to seek employment in 2018. Most importantly, Mitch came to an informal agreement with his ex-partner to visit his children weekly.

Mitch receives regular check-ins that show he is successfully managing and sustaining his tenancy. The collaborative approach between the department, and other agencies and organisations involved, has provided Mitch with the support he needed to work towards his goals, increase his

connection to the community, improve his quality of life and therefore keep him housed.

Mitch's story demonstrates the enormous impact a person-centred and collaborative approach can have on someone's life. That is why the Queensland Government has made a commitment to build upon the success of the project through the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2020 Action Plan*. An independent evaluation of the project was undertaken and found that it provided a vital service that:

- contributed to improving tenants' lives;
- helped establish the department as a human service organisation; and
- was a useful mechanism to achieve the necessary collaboration to holistically support tenants with mental health and other complex needs.

Endnote

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014, *Housing outcomes for groups vulnerable to homelessness*, Cat. no. HOU 274 AIHW, Canberra, pp. 19–24.

Mental health e-learning available

As part of the project, the department, with the support and assistance of the Queensland Mental Health Commission and Queensland Centre for Mental Health Learning, launched a suite of online training for frontline service delivery staff who work with social housing tenants with mental illness, mental health and wellbeing issues, or related complex needs.

This training is available to anyone interested in improving their understanding of effective service provision including government and non-government staff and individuals.

Two sets of resources are available:

1. Introduction to mental health
 - Understanding the mental health system
 - Suicide awareness
 - Alcohol and other drugs
2. Introduction to the housing and homelessness system
 - Navigating housing services
 - Applicant processes
 - Tenant processes

This training has been well received by users with comments including:

'A wonderful resource, beautifully engineered toward housing officers, housing managers and department staff.'

'This course is very informative and practical.'

'By being more aware and knowledgeable, I'll be able to refer and advise correctly.'

For further information on the training please visit: www.tenancysupporttraining.qld.edu.au

Working Outside of the Box: Community Clozapine Commencement for the Homeless Using Assertive Outreach

Barbara Baumgartner, Deanna Erskine and Briony, Homeless Health Outreach Team, Metro North Mental Health — RBWH, Metro North Hospital and Health Service (HHS)

The Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT), part of the Metro North Mental Health service in Brisbane, began in 2006 as Queensland Health recognised the need for specialist mental health teams for the homeless population. HHOTs exist in six areas of Queensland and operate from a model of assertive outreach. HHOTs share a Model of Service but vary in implementation. Brisbane HHOT is a multidisciplinary team (nursing, allied health, medical, and Indigenous health workers) that work across extended hours, seven days a week in a five-kilometre radius of the GPO.

This paper describes how HHOT initiated Clozapine treatment for a client, Briony, without a hospital admission, which was usual practice in the Hospital and Health Service (HHS) at the time and reviews how the team addressed the resulting challenges. Briony's situation was unique for several reasons — she wished to avoid hospital admission; she was alcohol dependent; she was living in crisis accommodation; and, the HHS did not have written policy to guide community commencement of Clozapine. While HHOT had supported past consumers who were taking Clozapine, they had never commenced someone on Clozapine outside hospital.

Briony's clear wish was to avoid hospital and to do so, HHOT needed to tackle how to support her choice in the absence of written procedures for community commencement. Whilst Briony was taking several medications to treat Schizophrenia, she reported ongoing symptoms. Waiting until she moved into stable accommodation to start a new medication was an option, but would require a delay of unknown length. Additionally, asking Briony to wait to start a new medication whilst the HHS wrote necessary procedure

would cause a lengthy delay, be incongruent with recovery-oriented practice, and lose an opportunity for recovery.

Mental health services vary widely on Clozapine implementation policy with only some having provision to commence treatment in the community.^{1,2} Working outside usual practice or procedure can be difficult in government health agencies where change and creation of policy to meet consumer need can be slow.

Due to some of the medical risks, Clozapine titration requires close monitoring, something that is easily done in hospital or by assertive outreach teams, although guidelines for the latter can be lacking. Outreach mental health teams appear ideally situated to support community Clozapine titration thereby preventing hospital admissions and minimising disruption to a consumer's life.

Briony's Experience

'I grew up in a home where domestic violence was very present. I started drinking at the age of 15 and by the time I was 21, I knew alcohol was a problem. My ability to communicate telepathically with people began as a child. When I was 23 years old, I was going through a lot of stress, working full-time and attending uni, some of my symptoms began to be a problem. I started going in and out of mental health inpatient units, trialled on different anti-psychotic medications. I eventually dropped out of uni, lost my job, attempted suicide, and became homeless. Drinking alcohol was the only thing helping me deal with everything going on, and it was the only thing that helped me sleep. When the doctor suggested Clozapine, I was open to trying it but only if I could avoid the usual

three-week hospital admission. The team was willing to come and visit me at home and because there were times I wasn't up for leaving my house, that also made it easier to try.'

How the Team Worked Differently

In order to meet Briony's choice to stay out of hospital and also start this medication, the team faced a dilemma — to work in a new way without community specific HHS policy, but to do it safely for Briony and staff. Engaging in recovery-oriented practices inherently involves taking some risks and in this instance, the risk was commencing a medication with potential serious side effects outside the safety of an inpatient unit. However, if services continue to make decisions solely on risk, opportunities for recovery become limited.³

While motivated to work from a recovery model and support Briony's wishes, clinicians on the team expressed concerns about the medical danger for starting someone on Clozapine outside of hospital. It is understandable that mental health teams, while wanting to embrace a change of practice, also struggle to do so, as risk is constantly being considered. As such, ongoing team discussions were a key part to changing how Clozapine commencement had previously been done.

The team medical lead was open to a community Clozapine initiation trial and ensured that this was within HHS scope despite the lack of written community commencement policy, using the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines, existing inpatient commencement procedure, and current literature in lieu. Discussing the proposed idea enabled the team

to identify potential problems of doing something new and to debate ethical issues (for example, to not allow Clozapine commencement in the community and essentially deny Briony a potentially useful treatment). Such conversations cultivated the co-development of a treatment plan that balanced risk with recovery.

As discussions ensued, the practicalities of how to proceed with community titration emerged and the team identified what forms needed creation, what equipment needed purchasing, and how they would respond to potential medical crises, such as fever or light-headedness. By mapping a variety of potential scenarios and corresponding responses, the team increased its confidence.

Implementing any type of change in practice involves preparation. Team conversations focused on what it would take to make a community Clozapine trial work for Briony, bearing in mind her wish to remain out of hospital. Engaging in debate highlighted the current practice of inpatient Clozapine commencement and how homeless consumers, such as Briony, were being excluded from treatment options. As staff had a forum to voice their apprehensions, have their concerns heard, and choose whether or not they wished to champion a new way of working, natural leaders for the trial emerged. These advocates informally began to take ownership of implementation and could respond to concerns raised regarding the change of practice.

Briony's Experience

'The team told me that there would be a lot of medical tests required when you're on Clozapine, but they tried to make it easy for me. I think it helped that I have a pretty easygoing attitude about medical tests and I'm not afraid of needles. In the beginning the nurses came to my house to take my temperature and blood pressure — it helped a lot that they came to me — it made it convenient. I also had to go for weekly blood tests for the first eighteen weeks and in the beginning they would pick me up and drive me. Later on they would just text me to remind me to go, which helped. There are a few disadvantages — I



Artwork by Briony

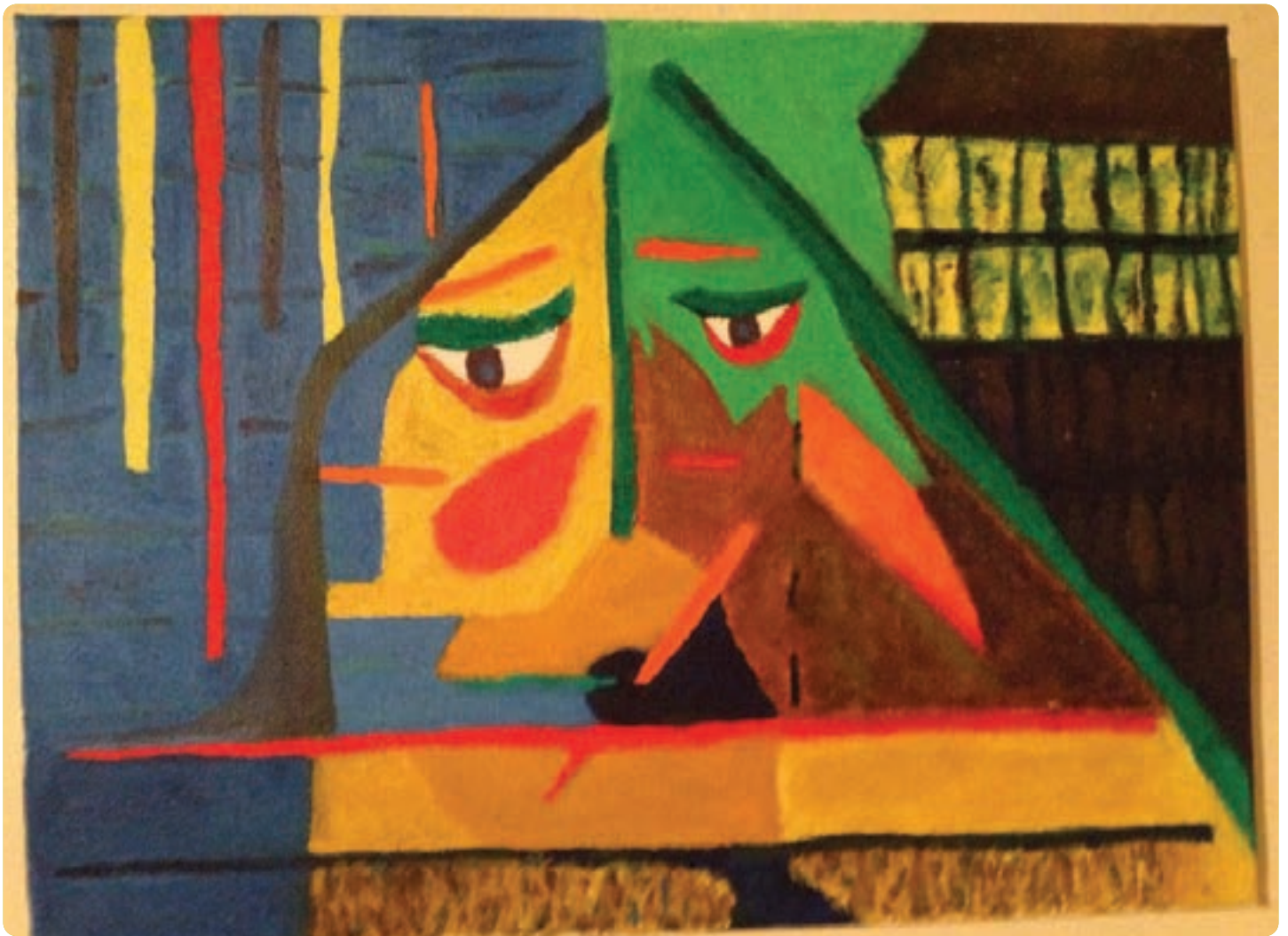
fainted twice at the start and I drool at night when sleeping. But there have been some good things about taking Clozapine — it helps me sleep. It's also really calming and it's helped me deal with the mental illness.'

Challenges and Outcomes

Overall, the team's experience of community Clozapine commencement was positive but also challenging and stressful as staff faced medical events, to which they were not accustomed. For example, repeated tachycardia in the early stages fuelled team apprehensions, requiring education and support by the medical lead. As well, Briony was brought to the hospital emergency department (ED) due to elevated blood pressure and temperature spikes. During one home visit, Briony reported that she had fainted the previous evening and got a bump on

the head, requiring another review in ED. Each of these incidents stretched the team's comfort level.

With the value of hindsight, ensuring that Briony had an established relationship with a General Practitioner (GP) at commencement of Clozapine may have assisted with follow-up of arising medical concerns. It took some time before a GP could be found, inadvertently delaying Briony's treatment her for ongoing nausea. GP care and the effective treatment of her nausea helped to prevent Briony from disengaging from the Clozapine trial. This highlights a typical challenge for homeless consumers and their support teams — having regular contact with a GP. Not only is it difficult to find GPs who are comfortable working with the homeless population, consumers are often reluctant to see a doctor. Teams



Artwork by Briony

that provide primary care and specialist mental health services address this well.

For the HHS, a primary outcome of this trial was the addition of community Clozapine commencement processes into existing policy, which is now used service wide. This has in turn increased consumer access, particularly homeless consumers, to Clozapine as a treatment option, improving outcomes and keeping consumer choice at the centre of practice.

With respect to implementing a new practice in a mental health service, we learned that having cohesive medical and operational leadership helps to champion change. Regular team discussions also ensure consumer safety within a recovery orientation and support staff risk tolerance.

Briony's Experience

'Clozapine isn't a medication for everyone — especially if you hate

getting your blood taken — but I think it's helped me. It's been almost 18 months that I've been taking it and I've maintained my apartment, returned to university study, and quit alcohol. I'm also able to hang out and get along with my family more.'

Summary

Given that approximately one in three cases of schizophrenia are 'treatment resistant', and that Clozapine is the only medication identified and licensed for consumers diagnosed with a treatment resistant schizophrenia, it is essential that Clozapine is an accessible treatment option.

In the authors' HHS historically, Clozapine commencement required hospital admission, inadvertently creating a barrier for consumers who did not want to be admitted to hospital. HHOT successfully addressed this dilemma to commence Clozapine in the community in advance of a community-based policy. It is important to acknowledge that

successful community Clozapine titration requires not only an invested and proactive team, but also a consumer who is motivated to engage in the intensive process.

This experience has improved our understanding of how systems can change to better fit individual consumers, rather than expecting consumers to fit an existing system. As such, the authors encourage other mental health teams to consider how they might change usual practice whilst still balancing risk and recovery.

Endnotes

1. Gee S, Vergunst F, Howes O and Taylor D 2014, Practitioner attitudes to clozapine initiation, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 130: 16–24. DOI: 10.1111/acps.12193
2. Gonzales C, Kodimela K and Poynton A 2013, Clozapine initiation in crisis teams, *British Journal of Medical Practitioners*, vol.6, no.3, pp. 624–627.
3. Tickle A, Brown D and Hayward M 2014, Can we risk recovery? A grounded theory of clinical psychologists' perceptions of risk and recovery oriented mental health services, *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Theory, Research and Practice*, vol.87, no.1, pp. 96–110.

Leone Crayden

Chief Executive Officer, QShelter



Homelessness in Queensland: Reform Fatigue

It's time to ensure there is synergy between supply and support strategies and reposition homelessness as a one of the major housing issues in Queensland.

Homelessness is a big problem in Queensland and successive government reforms at state and federal level have helped, but never go far enough or think broadly enough to make the practical changes required to end homelessness or reduce it to minimum levels.

While we wait for the new Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimate of people experiencing homelessness, expected in November or December 2017, the number of people presenting at homelessness services in Queensland has declined by two per cent every year over the past five years while people re-presenting has increased.¹

The rate of people using Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) is lower in Queensland, at one in 112

compared to one in 85 nationally.² That may reflect a lower rate of homelessness or a lower level of service use. AIHW data also tells us that people presenting in Queensland are more likely to be male, much more likely to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and more likely to be from outer regional or remote areas. Indigenous people are 6.7 times more likely to present than non-Indigenous people.

Since 2005, Queensland has experienced several waves of reform:

- the \$235 million *Responding to Homelessness Strategy 2005–09*, was a major reform at state level and committed the Queensland Government to matching (at least) the money coming from the Commonwealth. It also established that homelessness was a responsibility of many government agencies and allocated funds to Health, Attorney General, Education, Corrections and others to play their parts in reducing homelessness. At the time it led the nation.
- In 2011–14 the *Queensland Strategy for Reducing Homelessness 2010–2020* focussed on addressing prevention, housing and support and services reform. Using the federal government initiatives including responding to *The Road Home*,³ the Social Housing Stimulus package, The National Rental Affordability Scheme, The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), a seniors' strategy and a statement about inclusion for the LGBTIQ community. The Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Homelessness Planning and Coordination initiative was funded under the

Queensland Implementation Plan for the NPAH and ran from 2010–2013 resulting in seven regionally focused homelessness community action plans.⁴

- The Housing 2020 Strategy and Housing to Homelessness Strategy 2020 (2013–2015) suggesting significant sector reforms and recommissioning, improved intake and triage, increased supply and community sector housing reforms and regulation.
- The new Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027 commits \$1.8 billion towards 5,500 new homes, early intervention, service coordination and supportive housing for vulnerable young people.

Some good things have emerged from these reforms and we have hope the new strategy will bring success. Each wave of reforms reflected somewhat different emphases and varying levels of focus on housing supply, community action planning, sector reforms, prevention, support, service integration and the role of community housing provision as part of a broader housing system. Jenny Smith, the Chief Executive Officer of Council to Homeless Persons Victoria and Chairperson of Homelessness Australia said in the August edition of *Parity* 'the NAHA and NPAH... were the first attempt to put together a truly national response to tackling homelessness and providing affordable housing.' That work needs to continue and in Queensland we will do well to embrace a complementary suite of elements ensuring adequate housing supply combined with evidence-based support models resulting in sustained tenancies by the most vulnerable people.

Q Shelter sees future success being built around five critical elements:

1. Supply

Adequate supply-side strategies are needed to address the shortfall of homes as population growth surges. Supply-side strategies will be housing-system focused achieving diversity and optimal involvement of Government, the private sector and community housing providers. In Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) a multi-pronged approach is being taken⁵ including land release, transfers, shared equity home loans, land affordability and state tax changes to achieve better results. We encourage the Queensland Government's new strategy to consider a more expansive set of arrangements to boost supply.

Queensland is not building enough housing for those who need it. The Queensland Housing Strategy says 'almost 380,000 additional homes will be needed

by 2027 when Queensland's population grows to 5.7 million.'⁶ The strategy will invest \$1.8 billion over ten years building 4,522 social homes and 1,034 affordable homes statewide. Of the 380,000 homes required overall only one and 1.5 per cent of all new homes required are currently planned to be social or affordable compared with the 3.5 per cent of social housing as a percentage of current housing in Queensland.

2. The role of community housing in solutions to homelessness

The strategy may miss an opportunity to better utilise the community housing sector in helping Queensland expand social and affordable housing. The community housing sector already has a proven track record at responding to the needs of people assessed with very high needs. QShelter proposes that community housing providers are well-positioned to contribute more to housing supply options that

directly address homelessness. Specific provisions now need to be negotiated to realise this full potential. Elsewhere in Australia or overseas there is a trend of greater utilisation of the community housing sector in addressing overall housing shortfalls.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing responses

QShelter is highly aware of long-standing and unmet needs among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There is a need to re-invigorate the role of Indigenous Community Housing and other community controlled providers in direct responses to these needs. Health care models illustrate the successes of Indigenous controlled services because of effective engagement and therefore community trust and confidence. There are measurable improvements in health outcomes through this approach and potentially transferrable learning in relation to housing provision.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people are often denied access to ownership, renting and other services in private markets due to discrimination, in many cases by a lack of income but also thru direct racial discrimination. In this context, there is a duty to back community controlled service delivery. Community housing has proven successes in responding to these needs and there is an opportunity to further build capacity, grow housing and improve service delivery.

4. The relationship of housing and support

The connection between housing and support is essential in efforts to end homelessness. Leading practice in other jurisdictions focusses on adequate supply combined with effectively designed service delivery models that provide tiered support depending on needs. A proportion of homeless people have long-standing needs emerging from early trauma, and interrupted attachments in families extending to school and then later to education and employment.



Brisbane street art

The causes of homelessness for someone in this situation are deeply entrenched and supportive housing models are critical to success in ending homelessness where such entrenched patterns of vulnerability and disadvantaged have been allowed to consolidate over a whole lifetime.

Community housing providers do their best to house people with the highest level of need from the housing register however many people have serious unmet needs for intensive and ongoing support. Not everyone needs support to be ongoing but there is a considerable lack of support options for those people whose needs persevere and who struggle to sustain a tenancy. Getting support models right is likely to reduce the number of people re-presenting to services and there is considerable data available proving that effective integration of housing and support delivers substantial cost benefits because of reduced reliance on expensive tertiary interventions.

Queensland needs a sustaining tenancies program of support that addresses the needs of people for the duration of their need. Community housing providers will be positively impacted because

support to sustain housing reduces the cost of housing provision and ultimately reduces homelessness because the most vulnerable people are not cycling in and out of housing options.

5. Industry and sector development

Homelessness has been a core issue for QShelter since its inception in 1988 and while there have been many organisations, regional groups, interests and peak bodies involved in homelessness it is time to recognise homelessness and housing are part of a system and arrive at a means of properly representing the interests of all the parties to that system. Sector development and effective input to policy and program improvements is essential to the sustainability of positive reforms. In a regionalised State like Queensland, decentralised capacity and structures are essential as a mechanism for Statewide coordination of input to Government as well as appropriately designed local and regional solutions. Advancing this type of structural development will help to bring coordinated and evidence-based input to government and also help to drive the implementation of local and regional solutions.

The current strategy deliberately focuses on a ten year policy commitment which helps to bring stability and capacity to combined efforts to end homelessness. QShelter understands that enduring solutions need synergy between housing supply strategies, improved support programs, a more comprehensive role for community housing providers, and industry and sector development. Without harnessing these elements, it will be difficult to achieve enduring changes with measurable and positive outcomes. We need to envision 2027 as a critical milestone in our evolution as a total housing system involving government, the community sector and private industry in delivering housing and support solutions that really work.

Endnotes

1. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/6a1d876e-12a6-4499-87e5-6ebceba73d0c/20527-qld.pdf.aspx>
2. *ibid* aiwh
3. <http://apo.org.au/node/2882>
4. <https://www.qcross.org.au/hcap>
5. Rowley S, James A, Phibb, P, Nouwelant R and Troy L 2017, *Government led innovations in affordable housing delivery*, AHURI Final Report No. 289, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/289>, doi:10.18408/ahuri-8113101.
6. <http://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/housingstrategy/Documents/QLdHousingStrategy.pdf>.

Subscription/Order Form

Parity costs \$100 for a 12 month ten edition subscription.

☐ I wish to subscribe to Parity

Name

Address

Organisation (if applicable)

Telephone Fax

Email

☐ Organisations, institutions, employed: \$100 for 12 months

☐ Students, unemployed, pensioners: \$50 for 12 months

Multiple copies of parity can be provided for an additional \$35 per copy if they are to be delivered to the same address. (for example, two copies for 12 months: \$135, three copies for 12 months: \$170 etc).

☐ I would like additional copies to be sent \$

PAYMENT OPTIONS

☐ Enclosed is a cheque/money order

☐ Please charge my credit card (PLEASE PRINT):

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Bankcard

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Name on card

Expiry

Signature

☐ Please invoice me

Send completed form and payment to: Council to Homeless Persons
2 Stanley Street Collingwood Victoria 3066 T (03) 8415 6200 F (03) 9416 0200
Email: parity@chp.org.au www.chp.org.au/services/parity-magazine

Cost of subscription: \$

Additional copies: \$

TOTAL: \$

Supported by



**Queensland
Government**

