Responding to Homelessness in Queensland
Foreword — Anna Bligh

Responding to Homelessness in Queensland

This edition of Parity outlines some of Queensland’s achievements, the challenges we face in addressing homelessness and provides some information about the new and ongoing initiatives we have introduced which continue to provide real support to people who find themselves without a home.

As in the rest of Australia, homelessness affects many Queenslanders from all social and economic groups, from single young people to families with children and even seniors. Around 300 people sleep rough in inner-city Brisbane each night. On census night in 2006, more than 26,000 Queenslanders were homeless.

In 2005, the Queensland Government led the way nationally in addressing homelessness by providing $235.5 million over four years to the Responding to Homelessness Strategy 2005–09.

Building on the success of the strategy we are now working with the Australian Government through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to halve overall homelessness and to offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020.

To achieve these goals, joint investment of $284.6 million over five years will see expansion of existing effective approaches, the delivery of new services and a range of system improvements.

Queensland will also deliver approximately 4000 new social housing properties between 2009 and 2012 under the $1.2 billion Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, as well as upgrading and maintaining existing properties. This will give vulnerable people more affordable and appropriate housing options. This is on top of over $500 million in investment in housing through the Queensland Future Fund and Rural and Remote Indigenous Housing Program for long term and crisis housing throughout Queensland.

Reducing homelessness continues to be a priority for my Government and will contribute significantly to our vision to achieve a fair Queensland as outlined in Toward Q2: Tomorrow’s Queensland.

To ensure that housing is offered to the most vulnerable, services need to be targeted. That is why in 2008 the Queensland Government implemented a Housing Needs Assessment process to prioritise those most in need of help, including those who are homeless.

We believe that to help people end their homelessness it is imperative that service providers work closely together to deliver seamless and coordinated support. Therefore, we have funded the Queensland Council of Social Service (QCSS) to establish service system coordinators in seven regional homelessness ‘hot spots’. These coordinators will work with local communities to integrate and better equip the service delivery system to help people end their homelessness and will facilitate the development of Homelessness Community Action Plans.

We will also continue to work with our non-government service providers under the Queensland Compact, which guides the relationship between the non-profit community services sector and the Queensland Government to achieve better outcomes for Queenslanders.

We believe that to tackle homelessness we need to develop sustainable partnerships across government, the not-for-profit sector, business and the community. In the Brisbane Common Ground Project, my Government will partner with a developer, a homelessness support provider and a community housing provider to deliver around 140 units in an apartment building in inner Brisbane. Tenants in the apartment building will be a balanced mix of approximately 50% formerly homeless people and 50% people on low incomes, including employed people. We know that linking support with long-term housing is the best way to help those who are homeless to get their lives back on track so a team of support workers will be available on-site to help people to develop independent living skills, and to link them with appropriate wrap-around services, lowering the risk they will fall into homelessness again.

The Queensland Government allocated $22 million in 2010–11 to provide support and accommodation to vulnerable young people experiencing homelessness. The Government believes it is important to build on this investment with an increased focus on early intervention and prevention, which is why we are rolling out additional programs like Youth Housing and Reintegration Services across the State to support young people leaving care or youth detention with housing, employment opportunities and to reconnect with their families and their community. We have also established the Supported Accommodation for Young People which supports young people who are engaged in education and training and at risk of homelessness.

The Queensland Government acknowledges that homelessness is a complex issue and that there is no quick fix. We also know that the cost of addressing homelessness is less than the long-term cost of not doing so.

I am proud of the progress we have made to date and believe that through targeted funding and effective partnerships, Queensland can make significant progress in reducing homelessness.

Anna Bligh MP
Premier of Queensland
Editorial

Welcome to this, the August “Responding to Homelessness in Queensland” Edition of Parity.

This is the third edition of Parity that has been devoted to the in depth coverage of the response to homelessness in an Australian State or Territory. Previous editions have focused on South Australia and New South Wales. The present Queensland edition is another step along the way to creating a series that will examine analyse and discuss the response to homeless in all Australian States and Territories. Plans are indeed already underway for the 2011 “Responding to Homelessness in Tasmania” edition.

All these editions, and the Queensland edition is a perfect example, have been made possible by the support from the State Government in each State and as importantly the support and involvement of the homelessness sector and other related and connected mainstream service sectors.

This edition was made possible thanks to the leadership of the Queensland Government through the Department of Communities. With their support established, the homelessness sector was quick to endorse and support this project. The reader only has to look at all the different contributors to this edition representing the length and breadth of the Queensland homelessness sector to see how enthusiastically services and agencies grasped the opportunity to highlight their work and share the benefit of their experience.

This enthusiastic involvement highlights one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Queensland response to homelessness.

That is, the capacity and willingness of the Government and the sector to work together and collaborate on programs and projects designed to assist those experiencing homelessness.

The Queensland Homelessness Inter-Sectoral Forum made up of Government and NGO representatives meets regularly to analyse and discuss the progress of homelessness policies and programs. Similarly the Under One Roof (U1R) consortium (discussed in this edition) is a concrete and tangible manifestation of a co-operative and collaborative mind set that characterises the Queensland response to homelessness.

Queensland is distinct as well in the strong focus it has on housing and in particular affordable housing issues. A quick examination of the articles in Chapter Four point to this emphasis and focus.

The policy and program issues discussed in this edition are very much framed by the Queensland response to the Australian Government’s White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home. The Implementation Plan that was developed in the wake of the White Paper represents the most important context in which the policy and program response to homelessness in Queensland is being developed.

The contribution of Queensland to the national response to homelessness in amply demonstrated in this edition of Parity. With policy analysis from Queensland Shelter, QCOSS and from various legal, youth and women’s networks working in Queensland, this edition provides a powerful insight into the policy challenges Queensland (and the rest of Australia) is facing in transitioning from responding to homelessness to ending homelessness.

The edition also highlights the very ‘can do’ attitude, so common amongst workers and leaders in the homelessness sector, to grasp opportunities, think creatively and get on and do the business while also being reflective about our strengths and weaknesses and as such to the dignity and rights of the people we work with.

There is a great deal to learn from our friends in Queensland.

Michelle Burrell, CEO CHP

Acknowledgements

The Council to Homeless Persons would like to acknowledge the support of the Queensland Department of Communities for this project. In particular, thank you to Colin Thompson who has assisted in all stages of the development and production of this project.

Similarly, all the sponsors of this edition (see back cover) must be thanked for their strong support, encouragement and their assistance in organising and developing contributions.

Homelessness Australia August Update

By Travis Gilbert, Policy and Research Officer

With the highly successful Homeless Persons’ Week now concluded, Homelessness Australia now looks forward to hosting our 6th National Homelessness Conference on the shores of the Brisbane River commencing on the 1st of September.

Since our last update in July, the Federal Election has been held and we look forward to working in partnership with the Government to progressively end homelessness in Australia.

Homelessness Australia (HA) forwarded our election platform to the Housing spokespeople from the ALP, Coalition and the Australian Greens for their consideration. In it we called for all parties to sign up to:

• the target of halving homelessness by 2020;
• funding the construction of an additional 220,000 affordable homes (including social housing);
• an increase in income support payments of $45 per week;
• the expansion of early intervention and prevention programs;
• support for funding the pay equity test case, and
• strengthening the homelessness service system to deliver the best outcomes for people who are experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness Australia has also been represented at a number of forums on issues since our last update. These have canvassed a diversity of issues, including: homelessness and employment services, housing first solutions to homelessness and homelessness and older Australians. HA also participated in a housing forum convened by ACT Shelter and also heard from representatives from the ALP, Coalition and Greens about their housing and homelessness policies.

The sixth National Homelessness Conference will provide a fantastic opportunity for sector workers to network with Government representatives and people who are or who have been homeless, to share experiences and discuss solutions to the complex problems of homelessness.

As many readers would be aware, the theme of this year’s conference is Many Ways Home: Towards Ending Homelessness by 2020. With a decade to go until 2020 when Australia will hopefully meet the target of halving homelessness, the Conference provides an opportunity to review the progress that has been made in the homelessness arena and engage in constructive debate about what more needs to be done to meet the target of halving homelessness by 2020.

Homelessness Australia would like to sincerely thank our Event Coordinator Beverley Atkins for her dedication and the many months of hard work that have gone into ensuring that our Conference will be a resounding success. ■
Chapter 1: Government Responses and Initiatives

Implementing the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness in Queensland: An Overview

By Policy and Performance, Housing and Homelessness Services, Department of Communities

Under the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Homelessness, the Queensland and Australian Governments will jointly invest $284.6 million over five years for new and expanded services and system improvements to help people end their homelessness. This investment is a significant boost to the existing homelessness service system in Queensland, which comprises more than 230 funded service providers across the State. Funding of $81.5 million has been allocated for these services this financial year.

Initiatives funded through the NPA will support progress towards the national vision of halving overall homelessness and offering supported accommodation to all people sleeping rough by 2020. These long-term goals were announced in the Australian Government’s White Paper on homelessness The Road Home.

Queensland’s approach to tackling homelessness has been shaped by lessons learned in the comprehensive evaluation of the Queensland Government’s Responding to Homelessness Strategy (2005–09). The strategy foreshadowed many of the approaches in The Road Home by providing $235.5 million over four years to improve service systems for people who are homeless.

The external evaluation of the Responding to Homelessness Strategy confirmed that a focus on prevention and early intervention would create a better continuum of response, and that people who were homeless would benefit from improved coordination and integration of service delivery at the local level.

The evaluation also highlighted the need for greater sharing of responsibility by mainstream and specialist homelessness services to identify and support people who are homeless.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Under the NPA on Homelessness, Queensland will build on the Responding to Homelessness Strategy by delivering a range of new and expanded services that will focus on preventing homelessness and early intervention before homelessness becomes entrenched.

RentConnect is an innovative service designed to help Queenslanders access housing in the private rental market. Specialist RentConnect Officers are located in 14 Department of Communities offices across the State. They provide practical information and advice to help clients connect with local real estate agents and community services, and successfully locate and apply for a suitable rental property.

Vulnerable households that are already living in independent accommodation but are at risk of becoming homeless will receive help to maintain their tenancies from HomeStay support services. From the middle of 2010, non-government HomeStay service providers will help clients in 15 locations across Queensland to tackle the social and financial issues that are putting their tenancies at risk.

The NPA also includes funding for a range of initiatives that promote a ‘no exits to homelessness’ approach. These will help prevent people becoming homeless when they leave the care or custody of State Government agencies.

Initiatives include programs to help prevent homelessness for sentenced offenders exiting correctional centres, young people with disabilities exiting State care, young people leaving foster care and other out of home care arrangements, and people discharged from inpatient mental health care facilities. Most of these are now operational.

These new prevention and early intervention initiatives will complement existing responses to homelessness and will create a continuum of support that offers the best outcomes for homeless people, whose needs are often multiple and complex.

Rapid Settlement into Long-term Housing

It is well understood that to ‘break the cycle’ of homelessness, people who become homeless need help to move quickly through crisis systems into stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.

A Place to Call Home is a joint Federal, State and territory initiative that aims to stop families moving in and out of homelessness. The program provides accommodation together with other support services for up to 12 months to stabilise each tenant’s circumstances and ensure a long-term tenancy. Participants can remain in their accommodation once intensive support is no longer required.

The Brisbane Common Ground initiative will provide long-term housing and support to people who are chronically homeless, to help them regain stability and independence. The Common Ground model combines affordable housing with on-site support services that promote health and economic independence.
When completed in 2012, the proposed Brisbane Common Ground apartment complex will accommodate approximately 145 people. Tenants will include a balanced mix of formerly homeless people and those earning low incomes. They will have access to tailored support based on individual circumstances, for as long as they need it.

The Nation Building and Jobs Plan Social Housing Initiative and the Queensland Government’s Future Growth Fund are enabling an unprecedented growth in social housing stock across Queensland. The social housing built under these initiatives will provide vital longer-term affordable housing options for people who are exiting from homelessness.

The Queensland Government’s “housing needs assessment” process ensures that new and existing social housing dwellings go to those in highest need of assistance, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Queensland’s Implementation Plan for the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness includes housing and support initiatives that will help clients to end their homelessness permanently by supporting their participation in work and community.

These initiatives will link clients with employment, training and education services and opportunities such as the Resident Recovery Program, Supported Accommodation for Young People, After Care Services for young people exiting out of home care, and the Youth Enterprises Partnership.

**Transitional Assistance**

Sometimes, it is not possible or appropriate for vulnerable people to settle straight into stable housing. The NPA will address this by establishing new transitional support services that help vulnerable people to stabilise their situation and build their skills and independence.

As well as providing direct support, these services will connect their clients with other service providers where needed, including employment, training, mental health, general health, drug and alcohol, and parenting services. This support will help residents to stabilise their circumstances and move to independent living or reconnect with their families, where these are appropriate options.

Youth Housing and Reintegration Services (YHARS) will assist young people aged 12 to 20 years who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to transition to greater stability and independence. Support will focus on family and community living, maintaining tenancies and linking young people with education and employment.

YHARS services will have access to a range of accommodation options matched to clients’ housing needs. This includes a supervised community accommodation facility in Townsville for young males exiting detention, transportable community-managed youth studios to help young people at risk of homelessness to stay at home, and independent living units for young people with low to medium support needs.

The NPA is also supporting a Supported Accommodation for Young People initiative in Logan that is based on elements of the Youth Foyer model. The initiative gives young people who are at risk of homelessness stable accommodation, support and case management to help them with training, education and life skills, increasing their capacity for independent living.

**Assertive Outreach**

New assertive outreach services funded under the NPA will offer people sleeping rough the opportunity to end their homelessness.

Street to Home teams will deliver assertive outreach to people living on the streets, and give them the support they need to move and settle into stable accommodation with the aim of ending their homelessness permanently. The Queensland Government’s housing needs assessment process will give Street to Home clients who have high housing needs priority access to social housing.

The Brisbane Common Ground initiative incorporates a strong assertive outreach component. Micah Projects, the support provider for the project, is already engaging with people who are homeless and will support them to make sustainable transitions into a range of existing accommodation options, pending completion of the Common Ground building in 2011.

Homeless Health Outreach Teams (HHOT) provide assertive outreach for people experiencing homelessness and mental health, general health, alcohol and substance misuse concerns. Assistance includes direct support, general assistance and housing referral.

An evaluation of the HHOT initiative in 2008 found that the existing teams in Brisbane, Townsville, Cairns and Gold Coast were highly successful in supporting groups of clients who previously missed out on access to services or appropriate assistance. The NPA on Homelessness will enable expansion of the existing program to Sunshine Coast and Logan.

**Broader System Improvements**

New and expanded support services will not be sufficient in themselves to make a lasting impact on reducing homelessness.

Reducing homelessness will require a shift in the existing homelessness service system and the broader community service system, towards a more client-centred approach where service providers work together to deliver integrated support that is tailored to individual needs of vulnerable people and particular groups.

The Queensland Government is exploring ways of equipping service systems to use a ‘no wrong door’ approach to the way support is delivered to clients and to ensure they get the right response that best matches their needs.

Examples of the ‘no wrong door’ approach supported by the NPA on Homelessness include a trial of welfare workers in four hospital emergency departments to identify and assist people who are homeless, and training for ambulance paramedics to help them identify vulnerable clients and to provide appropriate referral to government and community services.

The NPA on Homelessness will also support the development of better information management tools to improve clients’ access to the right services at the right time to meet their needs.

**Engagement with Stakeholders**

The Queensland Government’s implementation of the NPA initiatives is driven by the commitments in The Queensland Compact: Towards a fairer Queensland. The Compact is a partnership agreement that guides the relationship between the non-profit community services sector and the Queensland Government.

In accordance with the principles in the Compact, the Department of Communities has established the Queensland Homelessness Inter-sectoral Forum (QHIF).

The QHIF is a forum for government and community sector representatives to collaboratively and actively bring about improvement, development and innovation in Queensland service systems and contribute to better outcomes for Queenslanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The Queensland Government is engaging with stakeholders at the local level to address homelessness in specific geographic locations. Local services and people have the knowledge, skills and networks that can most effectively address local needs and circumstances.

The Queensland Government wants homelessness to become ‘everyone’s business’ so homeless people are supported to become better involved in the community.

To support these outcomes, the Queensland Government is providing NPA funding to the Queensland Council of Social Service to establish a network of regional service system coordinators in seven regional homeless ‘hot spots’.

The regional coordinators will work closely with local communities and government agencies to improve coordination and integration through developing and implementing homelessness community action plans which will have a significant level of local ownership.

Ending homelessness will require a sustained long-term effort from all levels of government, business, the not-for-profit sector and the community.

The overall objective of the NPA on Homelessness is to develop seamless and coordinated human services that meet the multiple and often complex needs of people who find themselves without a home, and help them end their homelessness permanently.
Collaborative Homelessness Community Action Planning in Queensland

By Homelessness Programs, Housing and Homelessness Services, Department of Communities, and the Queensland Council of Social Service

This article, co-written by the Queensland Department of Communities and the Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS), looks at the development to date of the Queensland Homelessness Community Action Planning initiative. It describes a successful government and non-government sector collaboration that will produce better outcomes for clients through improving homelessness service system coordination and planning in the state.

Context

The Australian Government Homelessness White Paper, The Road Home, has ignited considerable interest in, and focused attention on, the issue of homelessness in Australia.

The Road Home confirms the need, expressed in the evaluation of the Queensland Responding to Homelessness Strategy 2005–09, for government and non-government agencies to forge partnerships and join up activity to design, plan, and deliver more effective responses to homelessness.

Homeless people and people at risk of homelessness often have great difficulty negotiating the maze of government departments and the plethora of services available. Clients may have to repeat their story many times to different government and non-government agencies to access appropriate services. Overwhelmed, some people may give up before they get suitable help.

Better coordination in the design and delivery of services can make a critical difference for people who find themselves without a home. All services that interact with homeless people need to work together more effectively to develop better pathways out of homelessness.

The Queensland Department of Communities has adopted a No Wrong Door philosophy to better coordinate services and to allow clients to access the most appropriate services in the quickest way. New ways of working together will make it easier for Queenslanders to receive the right support at the right time.

The task of reducing homelessness in Queensland cannot be underestimated. Current research strongly points to the need for innovative responses that go beyond the traditional government-community services nexus. We must draw together expertise and support from sections of the community not traditionally active in this space, such as the business community. QCOSS Director, Jill Lang, puts it well:

“Ending homelessness will be bigger than Government and the Community Services sector. It must involve the broader community and that is the intent of the Homelessness Community Action Planning initiative — to bring together all people and organisations, who have a stake in reducing homelessness — including broader community and the private sector, to identify solutions for tackling homelessness locally.”

The prospect of producing local homelessness community action plans throughout Queensland has sparked great interest and excitement in both government and non-government homelessness circles. For instance, Simone Jackson, the Regional Director for Government Coordination in Mt Isa, believes that the action planning process will bring together all the key players in Mt Isa to create better outcomes for homeless people. Simone said:

“We have high levels of Indigenous homeless people here and we want to see these people get the stable accommodation and support they need to achieve their potential in life. By bringing the key players together, and involving the broadest range of community input possible in planning and coordinating our activities, the plans will provide a focus for us to harness our efforts to improve the outcomes for homeless people.”

A Whole-of-Community Response to Reducing Homelessness

The Queensland Homelessness Community Action Planning initiative is a place-based initiative funded by both the Australian and Queensland Governments. The initiative will run for three years (July 2010 to June 2013) and will produce locally-owned action plans for selected locations throughout the State. Outcomes and achievements will be reported to the Queensland Homelessness Inter-sectoral Forum (QHIF).

The initiative will involve a wide range of government and non-government representatives such as: local specialist homelessness services; specialist services providing support to homelessness people; mainstream services that interact to varying degrees with the homeless population; local business; community members; and all tiers of government.

The Queensland Homelessness Community Action Planning process will bring into the mix non-traditional players such as philanthropic organisations and the private sector. The process will harness and expand community efforts to reduce homelessness.

In Brisbane, philanthropic organisations are beginning to play a key role in responding to homelessness. For example, the Rotary Club of Fortitude Valley convenes the Under 1 Roof initiative, a consortium of 10 agencies working as one united and coordinated service system towards ending homelessness in Brisbane. Under this program, a homeless person will be able to go to any one of the 10 agencies and then be referred to another member of the group for other appropriate support services.
Mission Australia State Director Tony Stevenson regards Under 1 Roof as a key to providing long-term support for Brisbane’s homeless. In an interview in April with brisbanetimes.com.au, Tony stated: “No one agency or individual can do it alone… Once a person is known to any of the services and is getting help from the service then we can go to other services and try and co-ordinate a package of support. When people have to go to services individually and go through separate assessment processes it is very, very difficult. So we want to have a uniform assessment process and a much more integrated way for us to come together.”

In a similar vein, the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign is a broad community initiative responding to homelessness in Brisbane. Initiated by Micah Projects in June 2010, and funded by the Mater Foundation, 50 Lives 50 Homes brings together a range of stakeholders, including law firm Minter Ellison, to house and support 50 of the most vulnerable homeless people in Brisbane.

Key Factors

The Homelessness Community Action Planning initiative is based on genuine collaboration between the Queensland Government and the homelessness community sector in the state. The sector, led by the peak bodies QCOS and Queensland Shelter, has played the driving role in advocating for the crucial need to improve the way homelessness services are planned, coordinated and delivered.

This advocacy, coupled with the release of The Road Home and Queensland’s signing of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, has led to effective partnerships between the Queensland Government, the homelessness sector and mainstream services to improve client outcomes.

Another factor in the successful establishment of such partnerships has been the Queensland Government vision of ‘Toward Q2: Tomorrow’s Queensland’. Toward Q2 describes the government’s key priorities, one of which is to mobilise a whole-of-community approach to tackle disadvantage and create safer, fairer and more supportive communities. Homelessness clearly belongs to this priority area.

Another major influence was the adoption of the Queensland Compact: Towards a fairer Queensland. Officially launched in November 2008, the Compact is a partnership agreement between the not-for-profit community services sector and the Queensland Government that promotes the sector and government working together to achieve a fairer society now and in the future. The Compact, co-produced by the government and non-government sector, signified a ‘fresh start’ to non-government and government collaboration in Queensland, heralding a new more respectful and trusting way of working together.

Developing the Model

Developing the Homelessness Community Action Planning model involved much discussion and debate through mechanisms such as the Department of Communities’ Homelessness Reform Group, the Homelessness Planning and Coordination Framework Focus Group and the QHF. Input came from homelessness service providers, Indigenous organisations, QCOS, Queensland Shelter, the Department of Communities and local government.

The Homelessness Community Action Planning model is firmly based on the principles of the Compact. The Department of Communities (Housing and Homelessness Services) leads the government input into the process. QCOS and Queensland Shelter have led the non-government aspects of the community planning process.

Under the model, a Homelessness Community Action Planner based in the Department of Communities works hand-in-hand with an NGO Team Leader based within QCOS. The Homelessness Community Action Planner provides support and guidance to a team of seven Government Coordinators, with one NGO Coordinator based in each of the Department of Communities’ seven regions.

The NGO Team Leader similarly provides support and guidance to a team of seven NGO Coordinators, with one NGO Coordinator based in each of the Department of Communities’ seven regions. By the end of September the NGO Coordinators will be on board. As the Homelessness Community Action Planner and NGO Team Leader work closely together, so too will the Government and NGO Coordinators. A shared work plan and shared vision will inform the activities of the Government and NGO Coordinators.

This team of 16 workers will develop a Homelessness Community Action Planning Framework that includes shared goals, work plans and tools to make the planning initiative a success.

Government Coordinators will work with Queensland Government agencies and the NGO Coordinators will work with specialist homelessness services, bringing together their knowledge and influence to expand, support, and where necessary establish new local homelessness networks. Government Coordinators will also have primary responsibility to work with government specialist services and mainstream services to ensure their involvement in local homelessness community action planning. NGO Coordinators will work broadly with the non-government sector to achieve the same goal. Both groups of coordinators will work in common to secure the participation of local government, the Australian Government, local business and broader community buy-in.

The Homelessness Community Action Planning initiative is just commencing implementation. It is at an early stage and we have a long way to go yet. However, the signs are good. A model for promoting community responses to homelessness has taken shape that locates responsibility for its success with both government and the non-government sector. We both have joint ownership and are equally committed to succeeding.

Over the next three years we will keep stakeholders informed of our progress and, hopefully, of great results in improving local service system planning and coordination. The ultimate measure of our success will be that, as a result of the Homelessness Community Action Planning process and through implementation of the action plans, fewer people in the areas where we work will find themselves homeless.
Community Support for Homeless People with a Mental Illness

By Community Mental Health, Disability Services, Department of Communities

The causes of homelessness are many and complex. Mental illness can be one factor that makes it difficult for people to maintain a secure tenancy. Over the past four years the Queensland Government, in collaboration with community stakeholders, has implemented a range of service models to help people with a mental illness to live well in their community.

The Queensland Government, through the Department of Communities, has adopted a recovery-oriented service delivery approach that focuses on the individual and their personal recovery journey. As a result, housing, among other life matters, has become an integral focus of the government’s policy position towards supporting people with a mental illness.

The department is implementing a number of mental health initiatives arising from the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) National Action Plan on Mental Health 2006–2011 and the Queensland Plan for Mental Health 2007–2017. Some of these initiatives also include capital funding for housing or accommodation for participants.

The community-based support initiatives listed below are specifically directed towards addressing the complex issues that may lead to homelessness. Most aim to reduce the risk of homelessness for people with a mental illness moving from either acute hospital care or correctional facilities.

The Housing and Support Program is a state-wide, cross-departmental initiative involving Queensland Health and the Department of Communities’ Community Mental Health Branch and Housing and Homelessness Services. Through this initiative, people with a psychiatric disability are supported to transition from acute and extended treatment facilities to sustainable community living in social housing.

Secure housing, combined with support for day-to-day living, dramatically enhances the person’s recovery from mental illness. People supported by the Housing and Support Program spend significantly less time in hospital than they did before commencing with the program.

The Housing and Support Program currently provides ongoing support to 215 people, with more than 230 people assisted by this initiative to date.

The Resident Recovery Program supports people with a mental illness living in boarding houses and hostels. This service operates in areas with the highest number of boarding houses and hostels to assist people with a mental illness who are moving from acute care mental health facilities into this type of accommodation.

The Resident Recovery Program gives people the skills to:
- maintain community tenure
- break the cycle of homelessness and re-admission to acute care facilities
- reduce the length of stay in inappropriate accommodation
- increase self-management of lifestyle and health needs.

Next Health and Footprints in Brisbane began delivering the program in January 2009 and support 172 people a year. The Australian Government and the Queensland Government, through further investment under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, have enabled the expansion of Resident Recovery Program services to an additional 120 people a year. These services will be provided by the Salvation Army in inner-north Brisbane, FSG Australia in Ipswich and Ozcare in Toowoomba.

This will bring the total number of people supported by the Resident Recovery Program to 292 per year from 2010–11.

The Transitional Recovery Program provides recovery-oriented support to individuals with a mental illness exiting inpatient hospital care. Support is initially provided in a residential environment for up to 12 months, and then up to six months outreach support is provided in the person’s own home.

This initiative commenced service delivery on the Gold Coast in March 2009. FSG Australia is the service provider and currently supports 14 people transitioning from hospital to the community.

Additional locations have now been added to this initiative, including Logan, Caboolture and the Sunshine Coast. The service will provide 25 places in Logan and Caboolture.

The Transition from Correctional Facilities Program provides non-clinical community-based support for people with a mental illness transitioning from correctional facilities to accommodation in the community. This initiative provides support for up to two weeks prior to release from the correctional facility and up to six months after release.

This initiative is provided in South East Queensland by the Richmond Fellowship of Queensland, in Townsville by SOLAS, in Cairns by Centacare, and in Rockhampton by Ozcare.

Since the program’s inception in 2007, 317 people have been referred to the service providers.

The Consumer Operated Services Program provides short-term support to people with a mental illness who need peer support and respite to prevent a hospital admission.

This is a new area of service delivery, although consumer-operated services have been established in other countries for a number of years. The program provides funding for support through peer workers to prevent escalation into crisis, particularly for people who are isolated in the community. This support may be provided through non-residential or residential services.

The Brook RED Centre delivers this service model in Brisbane, with FSG Australia developing the initiative on the Sunshine Coast. It is expected that the service will support up to 300 people across both locations.

The Time Out House Initiative is a new and innovative model of service delivery. It promotes the mental health, social and emotional well-being of young people aged between 18 and 25 who are experiencing early symptoms of mental illness.

This model has a short-term accommodation component of up to three weeks, with three months of community-based support enabling young people to maintain contact with their networks at all times.

The service being delivered in Cairns is led by Affercare, with additional support from the Far North Queensland Rural Division of General Practice, Youth Link and Centacare.

In Logan, Youth and Family Services are the lead agency, partnering with South East Primary HealthCare Network.

A number of other initiatives are being developed by the Department of Communities through Community Mental Health that focus upon early intervention and empowering people to make their own decisions about their recovery.

For more information about Community Mental Health programs, please call 07 3405 3595 or email mentalhealthbranch@communities.qld.gov.au. Information papers entitled ‘Future Directions’ for each of the new initiatives are available on the Department of Communities’ website at www.communities.qld.gov.au/disability.
Integrating Service Responses to Young People in Inner-city Brisbane

By Brisbane Region, Department of Communities and Children’s Health Services, Queensland Health

Background

As most residents of capital cities would be aware, the inner city is particularly attractive to a diverse range of young people for a variety of reasons. For some disadvantaged and vulnerable young people, it is a place to meet and to experience the bright lights, despite not always having the means to enjoy the recreational pursuits of their more advantaged peers. For others it is a central location to connect with friends and relatives who are dispersed across suburbs on the fringes of the city, where housing is more affordable.

In the inner city, people who are homeless can access a range of services, facilities, food and safety that are less likely to be found in outlying areas. Life on the inner-city streets, however, can present considerable risks, including exposure to violence, crime, drugs and alcohol, prostitution and, for young people, exposure to adults who may prey upon their vulnerability.

Like many capital cities, Brisbane has a population of young people who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness and who frequent the inner city precinct. A range of services responds to these young people in various ways and there have been previous attempts to coordinate services for specific groups of young people.

In late 2009, issues facing homeless young people surfaced in the Children’s Court after the arrest of young people squatting in disused inner city buildings. Calls from the police and the Brisbane Children’s Court Magistrate for action on this issue resulted in a collective of government and non-government agencies coming together to establish a more coordinated and enduring system of service provision to homeless and at-risk young people in the inner city.

Profile of Homeless Young People

While the demographic make-up of the inner-city homeless and at-risk youth population changes frequently, information from the Queensland Police Service shows that, at any one time, there are up to 170 young people within the target group. Ages range from 10 to 25 years, with the majority aged between 15 and 18. Many of the young people come into the city from outlying communities including Caboolture, Pine Rivers, Logan, Ipswich and Inala. The group is at times highly represented by young people from Pacific Islander and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

The Pacific Islanders Workers Network reports that some of these young people live in households with 13 or 14 people and are coming to the city and accessing drop-in services and the outreach vans which provide food. A large number are disengaged from school and are said to be discouraged from continuing education as they are New Zealand citizens and do not qualify for Higher Education assistance, nor can their families afford to send them for further education. Consequently, these young people are not being captured by early intervention responses to young people which are targeted to schools.

A number of inner city agencies engage with these young people and respond to their immediate needs, including providing material and financial aid and transport back to their communities.

How to Respond to Homeless Young People

The Department of Communities’ Youth Justice Service coordinated initial meetings of a range of government and non-government service providers who were already engaged with this group of young people or who had an interest in assisting. It was identified that a coordinated ‘complex case panel’ would improve communication between services and therefore coordination and integration of service responses to young people with high and complex needs.

The benefit of linking with Queensland Health’s existing Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) Homeless Youth Care Coordination Program was recognised early in this process. This program was launched in October 2009 as a cross-sector youth network group, made up of non-government organisations, state government departments and Brisbane City Council. The program’s aim was to increase collaboration between services to better support young people with mental health issues who were homeless or at risk of homelessness and to prevent them ‘falling through the service gaps’.

The Department of Communities’ Youth Justice Services approached the Child and Youth Mental Health Service to amalgamate their Inner City Youth Response complex case panel, (which provides case management to homeless and at-risk young people around the inner city) with the Homeless Youth Care Coordination Program. This amalgamation was accepted by stakeholders including CYMHS, Queensland Police Service, Department of Communities, Brisbane City Council and non-government organisations. A working group was formed involving Youth Justice Services, a broad representation of non-government service providers with a focus on inner-city youth and the Department of Communities’ Youth and Family Support Services, to develop the process for referrals to the complex case panel for young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

From February 2010, homeless and at-risk young people with complex needs have been referred to this cross-sector complex
case panel, which is now called the Homeless Youth Care Coordination Program (HYCCP). The panel is jointly coordinated by a facilitator from Queensland Health’s Child and Mental Health Services and an external facilitator engaged by the Department of Communities. Young people work together with their community case manager/s, cultural representative and mental health clinician (if required) to develop a case management plan that creates a protective social network that will address their support needs.

**Capacity-building for participants in the integrated response**

The Queensland and Australian governments have committed additional resources, specialist skills and tools to achieve a more integrated and sustainable system.

The Australian Government recently provided funding to employ a Project Officer based in the Department of Communities’ Brisbane Regional Office. This position will develop and implement tools to facilitate this integrated response. Tools will include:

- common data collection forms and systems, such as joint data formats and definitions to provide consistency and accuracy of information across services
- common assessment forms and systems, to facilitate common understanding of multiple needs and appropriate responses
- longitudinal case management tools to facilitate ongoing, all-inclusive support including for those clients that are transient, and common referral processes among the integrated services
- a needs/resource register which details all targeted clients, their needs and the resources available to assist them, and
- data sharing protocols, such as common privacy authorisations on clients forms.

A training and capacity-building package will also be developed and delivered to services involved in the HYCCP and other providers who work with this group of young people. The project and tools will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness, giving direction for future improvements within the service system.

The complex case panel is working with an identified high-needs group. However, other young people would also benefit from an early intervention response. As more information is obtained about the communities of origin of these young people and their local communities and networks, it is planned to engage funded and non-funded agencies in this integrated service response. This is not only to ensure that services provided in the inner city don’t conflict with any services received from local workers, but too also engage these workers in the training and capacity-building process. An example would be a mentoring program run by Pacific Islander-specific workers.

**Proposed Benefit of this Project**

This project aligns with the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPA) initiatives, notably the Homeless Information Management Program (HIMP), and Homelessness Community Action Planning being undertaken by the Queensland Department of Communities and the Queensland Council of Social Service. It will be informed by several recent service integration projects such as the Logan-Beenleigh Young Persons Project.

These activities are also consistent with and support the Department of Communities’ No Wrong Door approach, which focuses on improving integration of services for those who are most disadvantaged or who have multiple and complex needs. The No Wrong Door approach will improve pathways for clients to access government or non-government services that are better matched to their needs.

This project will improve access for clients to the range of services offered by the Department of Communities and the non-government sector, and will inform and enable the collaborative development of common intake, assessment and referral processes. It will provide opportunities for ongoing capacity building and a cross-sector commitment to shared clients across both government and non-government services. This includes capability development for integrated working; the Department of Communities’ sector development’s initiatives in relation to workforce capability; and the identified priority of coordinating care through service integration under the Queensland Health Plan for Mental Health (2007–2017). More broadly, the project aligns with the Queensland Government’s strategic intent for client-centred and streamlined human services.

**Acknowledgement**

The Department of Communities and Queensland Health wish to acknowledge the important contribution of government and non-government service providers in the inner city and communities of origin of homeless and at-risk young people, as well as their families, who work tirelessly to ensure an improved future for their young people. Without their knowledge of, and dedication to, the young people themselves, we could not have achieved what we have to date.
The Queensland Government has expanded its private housing services to help people find secure housing in the private rental market.

A new frontline advisory service — RentConnect — is helping people to navigate the private rental market and compete effectively for tenancies. The government has also extended its eligibility criteria for rental grants to support Queenslanders leaving public institutions and crisis accommodation into secure rental housing.

Queensland’s one social housing system offers social housing to clients with the greatest need, for the duration of their need. This has improved the efficiency of allocating social housing, but demand for social housing continues to outstrip supply. Many clients cannot be offered social housing, but may be eligible for other types of assistance.

RentConnect was developed to help people secure appropriate, affordable private rental housing. This early intervention helps prevent people becoming homeless and thereby reduces demand for specialist homelessness services.

It contributes to the outcomes and strategies of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, including:

- People at risk of or experiencing homelessness will be supported by quality services, with improved access to sustainable housing; and
- More effort is required to prevent and intervene early to stop people becoming homeless ... Effective prevention and early intervention strategies need to address both individual and structural causes of homelessness.

RentConnect helps families who are escaping family violence or leaving care and custodial settings to find safe and sustainable housing. It helps people to avoid homelessness when they leave social or private rental housing, and it may also reduce the likelihood of repeat homelessness.

RentConnect is for clients who have the ability to sustain a private rental tenancy but need help to overcome access barriers such as knowledge, literacy, presentation issues and risk perceptions. RentConnect officers help clients search for houses, inspect properties and fill out rental applications — simple things that make a big difference.

Over the past 12 months (2009–2010) 1,177 households received personalised, one-on-one assistance and coaching from RentConnect Officers in Housing Service Centres across Queensland. Most were single adult households (70%) and many included children (60%). A significant proportion had no rental history (27%) or came from culturally and linguistically diverse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (22%). RentConnect Advisory Services were also provided to young people (17%), people with disabilities (17%) and large families (12%).

The RentConnect advisory service is not a crisis response, however, case studies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1 Characteristics of households assisted with interview-based support (number, percentage of total). Research indicates these characteristics may impact on capacity to access or maintain a tenancy and risk of homelessness.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Young people</td>
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<td>People with disability</td>
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<td>Large families</td>
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<td>Leaving social housing</td>
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<td>Leaving correction facilities, long stay hospital</td>
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NB. Some households identified with more than one barrier.
reveal that clients may present with primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness.\textsuperscript{4} RentConnect reduces immediate and ongoing risk of homelessness by building client skills in accessing and sustaining tenancies in the private rental market.

\textbf{Client Outcomes}

Services began in pilot locations in September 2008. Since then, 1,486 clients have received information and advice, coaching, help preparing documentation, direct referrals or help with transport to properties. A high proportion (505) have secured tenancies. Fact sheets were provided via 34,537 downloads, 2,369 at the front counter and 502 from RentConnect Officers.

Feedback from real estate agents shows that advocacy with agents for specific clients was particularly useful, pointing to the “significance of agents’ attitudes in creating or removing access barriers for low income households”.\textsuperscript{5}

Most clients are referred internally by Housing Service Centres or by local community organisations. Some clients presenting as homeless have been helped to secure private rental tenancies and others have reported that the service has prevented them from becoming homeless. However, long-term information is not yet available to demonstrate the full impact of this service on the social housing system, including reducing homelessness. ■

\textbf{Footnotes}

2. National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Outcome 14(d) and key strategy 18(a) (p. 5, 6)
3. National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness section 24 p. 8
4. National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness 12 (d) and (e), p. 4

\textbf{Examples of RentConnect responses to homelessness:}

\textbf{Case 1}

The client’s husband, who has an acquired brain injury, had been in hospital six months. The client and her teenage children were living with a family friend, in a transitional housing property. Her husband was due for discharge, but required ground level accommodation with minor modifications. The family had fallen into rent arrears after the husband’s accident, and had not repaid it all. Applications for several private market properties had been declined. Their social housing application was assessed as ‘very high need’ but a suitable property was not yet available in their requested suburbs.

The RentConnect Officer:
• had an initial meeting with the client and set up a payment plan to repay all rent arrears in small amounts;
• drew up a budget and discovered the household could afford to pay up to $330 per week for rent;
• worked with the client to identify suitable properties and attended property inspections with her;
• visited the real estate agency with the client, and assisted her to complete the application process, and
• helped the client obtain a bond loan.

\textbf{Outcome}

Eight days after the initial RentConnect interview, the family were approved for a six-month lease on a private rental property at $300 per week. The owner allowed necessary modifications to be made.

\textbf{Case 2}

A 19-year-old woman was homeless and living in her car. She was having no luck finding rental accommodation because she had no rental history. Her 17-year-old boyfriend also needed housing.

The RentConnect Officer provided advice and advocacy.

\textbf{Outcome}

The client secured a one-bedroom flat for herself and her boyfriend. After six months in this tenancy she is using the skills learnt through RentConnect to look for a larger rental property closer to her work.

\textbf{Case 3}

An Indigenous mother with three children was living in crisis accommodation after moving interstate. She had applied for social housing, but had not sought private rental, as she had a limited Centrelink income and a previous TICA listing.

The RentConnect Officer:
• met with the client and determined her needs, and assisted with transport to property inspections
• accompanied the client to property inspections and helped her prepare a tenancy application.

\textbf{Outcome}

After some discussion about the TICA listing, the client was approved for a property the following day. A bond loan and a rental grant were provided, and the family moved into the property four days later.
Chapter 2: Issues at Stake in Response to Homelessness in Queensland

The ‘Not So Lucky Country’

By David Hinchliffe, Councillor, Brisbane City Council

Before Queenslanders pat themselves on the back for avoiding the Global Financial Crisis, we should spare a thought for those who have been part of a much longer and much more personal financial crisis ... our homeless.

There seems to be no shortage of initiatives to address homelessness, but likewise there’s no shortage of homelessness to prove that more needs to be done.

As recently as this month, garbage collectors in Brisbane reported homeless people living in large commercial waste bins. One was being emptied when its unsuspecting ‘resident’ woke up just in time!

This isn’t a story from ‘Hells Kitchen’ in New York or downtown East Los Angeles. It’s happening in upbeat Fortitude Valley in the ‘new world city’ of Brisbane in the Smart State of Queensland.

To start to fathom why, we have to analyse the problem. The issue of homelessness is like the Hydra — the mythical creature with many heads.

The first step in addressing the complexity of the homelessness Hydra has to be understanding.

It’s about understanding that homelessness doesn’t have a black OR white face, that it’s not old OR young, not male OR female, that it’s not single OR married and it’s not substance abuse OR mental health-related. Homelessness affects all categories of people and has manifold causes. Once we understand that, we can appreciate there isn’t a one-size-fits-all solution.

For example, not every homelessness problem will end in a housing solution. For those of us who love the security and warmth of our own four walls and roof, it’s culturally and psychologically challenging to imagine some people (albeit a small minority of the homeless) will continue to live rough on our streets or in our parks.

For the majority however, the need for secure, warm, reliable accommodation is a desperate need. So too are other means of support — medical, financial and moral support.

When we trialled a shelter in New Farm Park 10 years ago to deal with a decades old problem of park dwellers, we realised early on that the pattern of substance abuse was in part the result of medical problems like sore teeth which weren’t being addressed. People drank to lessen the physical pain. Drinking made them hostile, hostility made them difficult to house. Money spent on booze was money not spent on rent. Back then Queensland Housing would not re-house former tenants with outstanding arrears. So, the cycle was perpetuated.

Ending the cycle by providing stability of services is essential. It is virtually impossible
to do that if people are being moved from pillar to post, or in this case, from park bench to bus shelter.

Figures are always dubious when trying to enumerate the homelessness problem, but official statistics indicate that something like 350 people on any one night in the Brisbane are completely homeless, with a further 4,500 living in unsafe or insecure accommodation.

But the numbers don’t tell us much about the true face of homelessness.

The multiplicity of homelessness was graphically displayed through a project I was pleased to initiate with the Courier Mail and Brisbane’s most famous homeless centre, the 139 Club, in Brunswick St Fortitude Valley. The ‘Detours’ photographic exhibition opened by Governor Penelope Wensley allowed the Brisbane public to see the personal stories behind the often familiar faces of people who were (and are) well known identities on the street.

When the Governor of a State sits down with people who have spent literally decades rummaging through bins or pounding the pavements of our city, something truly magical happens. Eyes are opened. Hearts are opened. Respect grows and so too does esteem. Plans are underway to tour the photographic exhibition and a possible book is in the planning.

A number of homelessness initiatives came from the former ‘coalition’ Council (when a majority of Labor Councillors combined with the LNP Lord Mayor to form the government of Council from 2004–2008).

One was “Homeless Connect”. The current Council has continued the program which provides special days when people experiencing homelessness can access services from all levels of government, businesses and community groups for needs as simple as haircuts and clothing through to information on employment, accommodation and medical and legal advice. More than 4,200 people have been assisted since the first Homeless Connect in Australia was established in 2006. Perth, Hobart, Adelaide and the Gold Coast have followed suite.

While City Hall was being closed for major renovation, the Red Cross Night Café which provides food and services twice weekly to young homeless and disadvantaged young people relocated to Hale St in nearby Paddington.

Thirty-seven houses acquired by Council through drainage and road projects have been recycled as social housing with the assistance of NGOs through a program known as Community Housing Partnerships.

Arising from the New Farm Park trial a decade ago, the award-winning Brisbane Housing Company (BHC) represents a ground-breaking partnership between Council and State to provide housing. More than 750 new apartments have been constructed since BHC was established eight years ago. Now that the Federal Government has expanded its programs for housing, BHC has become a willing partner in the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) program.

RecLink Australia is another partner that Council has embraced in providing sporting, cultural and recreational opportunities for those in housing and financial stress.

Partnerships are the only way to address such a complex and varied problem as homelessness. Whether it’s the Salvos, Mission Australia, City Care, St Vincents, Anglicare, Community, Rosies, Drug Arm, 139 Club … whatever agencies are out there on the street working with people in need, the underlying precondition for success has to be understanding.

If we think for a moment that one agency alone has all the answers to homelessness and that homelessness itself fits neatly into one measurable, definable category, then we are bound to be bitterly disappointed … and more importantly we are bound to disappoint the people who need our support and our understanding the most.
Homelessness in Queensland: Service Providers Perspectives

By Peter Mengede, Policy Officer, Queensland Shelter

A lot has changed since the election of the Rudd Government in 2007. At the time it seemed as though the planets had aligned for the homelessness and housing sectors. Under Kevin Rudd’s leadership, Australia achieved State, Territory and Federal accord. There was an attendant commitment to cooperation with a focus on homelessness and housing reform and the growth stewardship of the Council of Australian Governments.

Respect for the homeless was touted as a barometer of our compassion. There was a more pragmatic approach to refugees, an apology for the historical mistreatment of Indigenous Australians was delivered and global warming was identified as the greatest moral challenge of our generation. These grand ideas may have inspired a nation to loftier ideals. But have they translated into better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness in Queensland?

The 2008 collapse of the U.S. housing market, rampant mortgage defaults and repossessions and flow on economic effects ushered in an unprecedented stimulus package that led to the largest investment in Australian social housing since World War II.

When the feared tsunami of unemployment, mortgage defaults and repossession failed to reach our shores, Australia embarked on the ponderous process of turning an ideal, ending homelessness, into a program. Attention has been focussed on learning from efforts in other countries where the full extent of homelessness has been obscured by bureaucratic taxonomy. For example, recent reports from the U.K. show that primary homeless figures have trebled since reporting by all councils, not just those that believed they had an endemic problem, became mandatory. Similarly, a 60 percent reduction in the number of secondary, or statutory homeless has been attributed to the UK’s tightening of public housing eligibility criteria.

The New York Common Ground Project, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the economic and retail redevelopment of Times Square have all contributed to considerable gains in reducing homelessness. Only one person still sleeps on the streets within the Times Square eight block zone. Yet, on any given night shelters across the city’s five boroughs are filled to overflowing.

Consultations

Service providers questioned whether we have moved away from what they described as Kevin Rudd’s view of homelessness as a shared community responsibility, towards homelessness as a game of numbers.

A number of common themes emerged during these conversations:

• the need for long term transitional, community, and social housing tenant supports;
• the need to enhance the capacity of specialist homeless services to provide outreach services;
• the need for inclusive youth housing models that do not exclude or neglect young mothers or people from backgrounds of entrenched disadvantage, nor categorise young people as adults but respects their age as unique;
• the need for clear direction from the Department of Communities about the future of SAAP agencies post 2012, and
• the need for practical support for collaboration with the full spectrum of specialist support services that acknowledges both the resource intensive nature of this work and the responsibility of well resourced agencies’ responsibility to take a lead role in developing local networks.

The majority of those consulted expressed the view that SHS are the best fit for persons experiencing homelessness and their capacity to work with clients outside of the crisis accommodation system and across private, residential, and social housing tenures. SHS need to be adequately resourced to do so.
Service and Reform Clarity

Since the announcement and introduction of the One Social Housing System in 2005 and the subsequent release of The Road Home White Paper on homelessness, SHS have been informed that there will be reforms to the SAAP sector and that these reforms may mean a change in service delivery. However, there has been no articulation of what these changes may mean, leading to particular concern about the implications of these changes for smaller organisations. For many organisations this creates uncertainty, particularly when considered alongside the community housing growth agenda where scale of provision is encouraged amongst growth providers.

For regional organisations with well developed local networks, contact with or lines of communication from the Department in South East Queensland would help align local initiatives with State and Federal strategic directions and reduce the impression that these services are working in a policy vacuum. A number of services found it difficult to find reliable information with Department of Communities offices having had turnovers of up to four Community Support Officers in six months.

Statewide, services stated that there was a need for streamlined information from program and operational areas of the Department of Communities and likewise, the need for increased opportunities for dialogue. NGOs said they were having difficulty aligning with the new strategic agenda without there being clarity regarding the nature and progress of this agenda.

Regional consultations were needed to keep services up to date as local offices were unable to provide the required information. Services stated that considerable training was needed to help services understand the way the Government and NGO sectors could work together. Services agreed that SAAP is an effective program with clear management guidelines that provides excellent and graduated support. Yet almost all services expressed concerns about the future of SAAP and their future once funding agreements expire in 2012.

Collaboration

Services stated that there was a need to improve Government and NGO shared understandings of what collaboration entails at a local level and of the time and energy required to make collaboration work. Funding agreements should acknowledge that collaboration takes time away from service delivery as well as recognising the improved outcomes it provides.

Services suggested that they would appreciate some direction about how they might best align themselves with the new service system. According to SHS, those large organisations that have received significant outreach or early intervention funding under the Implementation Plan are perfectly placed to play a lead role in partnering with smaller organisations to provide synergies in the service delivery system. This initiative would be welcomed.

Services are hoping the Non Government Organisation Coordination (NGOC) program will provide networks with greater leadership, support and direction.

Support

The need for post-crisis accommodation support was a common thread of all conversations. One of the major obstacles facing services, other than a lack of accessible social housing, is the lack of support services that are available to help people maintain their accommodation once they have moved into long term housing. Services that have access to support are increasingly reliant on Street to Home programs.

Resourcing

The introduction of the Queensland Community Services Assistance Award 2009 and the decision by the Queensland Government to partially fund these wage increases meant that many organisations had to reduce hours or re-classify positions to ensure sustainability and balance budgets. This reduction in service delivery hours detracted from client outcomes. Many in the sector felt that this was at odds with the White Paper’s stated intent of developing the SHS sector to attract and retain a skilled workforce.

In one case, the agency’s SACS workers have received partial payment of the increase with the balance being distributed amongst other centre staff such as administrative workers and cleaners.
Services report the mainstreaming of allied community services that provide mental health support, in home support for living skills and basic things people with complex needs require, has proved to be a short term approach.

An example of such a program is the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHAMS), which was established to provide in-home support to people living with a mental illness. This program has proven extremely helpful for the broader community but lacks the specialist expertise needed to work with formerly homeless clients with multiple morbidities.

Allied services operate within different practice frameworks that don’t directly translate to accepted community approaches, making it difficult to pick up where SHS leave off. SHSs are often re-approached by former clients once their case has been closed by PHAMS for failure to keep appointments or because of difficult behaviours.

Dedicated programs such as the Health Homeless Outreach Team (HHOT) have proven far more successful in delivering a Government response that works closely with specialist homelessness services. However, the HHOT program is limited in its ability to continue working with a client once they have been housed.

One service suggested that:

**A better solution is to have a specialist service follow the client through themselves to provide consistency of approach, relationships, and support. There’s a need to follow through where the relationships already exist. It’s very hard for someone with very complex needs to make that transition and that’s often where they get lost. If we were able an extra two or three workers who could follow through with people once they’ve left a specialist service we know that those tenancies will last.**

While stabilising supports are generally provided for three to six months, some clients will need support indefinitely as tenancy support needs to be specialised, relationship based and not time limited by program guidelines.

**Community and Social Housing**

Community and Social Housing providers are required to house an increasing number of high needs clients to ensure that limited stock is allocated to those in greatest need. Yet this is done without an equivalent increase in funding for tenancy supports. It is too early to gauge the impact of the Nation Building economic stimulus package increase in social housing stock. Most services noted a high level of willingness on the part of community housing providers (CHPs) to house crisis accommodation clients.

Their level of confidence in placing difficult clients would be improved if there were a funded mechanism that allowed SHS to support clients once they had been housed.

In some cases, and in lieu of this mechanism, CHPs are reported to have adopted a punitive breach based approach to dealing with high needs clients, evicting rather than referring them to SHS. The underlying rationale for this approach can be gleaned from interstate reports on measures taken to grow the community housing sector.

The recent Victorian Auditor General’s report, Access to Social Housing, reviewed progress in Victorian efforts to grow the community housing sector through capital contributions and the transfer of $757 units of social housing. The report identified a tension between the two sectors. The State’s objectives are to have social housing provided to those with the least capacity to pay, while having social support and portfolio growth delivered at no cost to the State.

In contrast, the community housing sector is increasingly looking to house tenants with greater rent paying capacity and lower needs, reduce unnecessary expenditure and avoid unserviceable debt. This is evidenced by the fact that only three of the eight housing organisations that have received stock transfers intend to use them to leverage additional borrowing.

Services suggested that CHPs that generate surpluses or with profitable portfolios such as the Community Managed Studio Unit (CMSU) program should be given the flexibility to use these funds to broker support from SHS.

Otherwise, SHS are concerned that community housing providers will increasingly tend towards an asset management approach that monitors income streams when housing high needs clients and opt to breach rather than refer them to specialist services at the first sign of difficulty.

**Young People and Social Housing**

There were varied schools of thought regarding the suitability of social housing for young people. In one case, the Queensland Foyer model was thought to be discriminatory in excluding young women who are either pregnant or parenting. The assumption being that parenting precludes young women from participating in education, training, or employment. Services viewed this exclusion as encouraging welfare dependency and suggested that future programs base themselves upon UK foyer models that provide crèche facilities as a solution.

According to providers, many models of housing treat young people as children by imposing excessive rules and expectations that young people entering the homeless system find difficult to observe or through adult models that demand a higher level of life skills and social adeptness.

Long term social housing can often be regarded as an outstanding outcome for older people with life experience, social and coping skills, or support packages. Yet, social housing without ongoing support was regarded as a potentially damaging ‘set and forget’ option for young people from backgrounds of entrenched disadvantage and unemployment.

For sixteen to twenty one year olds who come in off the streets or out of shelters without life skills, placing them in housing where they’re left alone can be quite detrimental. These kids come from backgrounds with entrenched systems of generational unemployment. It can be really difficult to break that cycle unless extra support comes with housing.

SHS also stated that market based rent models do not support young people who are often excluded because of insufficient incomes.

Programs such as the Nation Building Jobs Plan could exponentially increase their efficacy if they were coupled with work programs that provide employment and training for young people looking to learn a trade. This could provide a lasting benefit when combined with SHS outreach support.

**Regional Partnering and Referrals**

Negotiating movement from SAAP to transitional housing can be made more difficult by both inter-agency and geographical differences. Regional SHS report difficulty in placing clients in transitional housing located in their city, particularly when the stock is managed by an organisation in another locale. Conversely, they find themselves doing tenancy and transitional support work for tenants of the outside organisation. Suggestions include matching SHS crisis accommodation with transitional housing stock to allow for smoother transitions and strengthening MOUs and partnerships through the recently announced Non-Government Organisation Coordinators Position.

**Conclusion**

While some services see a profound change in the willingness of social and community housing providers’ to work with high needs clients, others have seen very little difference at the business end of homelessness for their client groups. All agree that ongoing support is needed to help people achieve better outcomes and that specialist homelessness services are best suited to provide it. However, SHS require adequate resourcing to allow them to provide case management pre and post-crisis accommodation.

By the time this edition goes to press, a new Federal Government will have been elected and its direction defined. SHS hope that the new government builds on progress made through the White Paper and strengthens partnerships between support and housing services to ensure that ameliorating homelessness remains on the national agenda.
Why Queensland Needs a Youth Homelessness Action Plan

By Maria Leebek, Executive Officer, Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc

Young people and children make up a large proportion of the people who are homeless. In fact, young people 12 to 24 years of age make up 36% of all people who are homeless in Queensland.

Other States and Territories have recognised the need to respond to this significant group of young people with NSW having developed a ‘Housing Plan: Youth Action Plan 2010–2014’ and Victoria the ‘Youth Homelessness Action Plan — Stage 1 and 2’. Queensland has yet to recognise this need.

Not only are young people a significant proportion of the homeless population but research, particularly the work of Dr Guy Johnson, has identified that if young people are not properly supported when they first experience homelessness, they have a higher chance of becoming homeless in their adult lives. Furthermore, substance misuse and mental health issues occur for many people once they become homeless.

In addition to this research we already know that homeless young people are marginalised due to their lack of capacity to engage in mainstream activities such as education, training or employment because of emotional and or financial factors. Clearly we need to consider a targeted approach.

The Need for a Plan

There needs to be an acknowledgement of the impact and the implications of the life stages of young people. Particularly their progress through adolescence and their key transitions such leaving school, voting, entering into the labour market and the development of their social and living skills.

A Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan can take into account these unique factors.

In constructing the Victorian Youth Homelessness Action Plan there was recognition of the need to develop key practice concepts regarding young people that would underpin their strategy. A Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan can be based on similar principles.

The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition has already utilised these concepts, integrated them with our theoretical understandings and merged them with the new ideas around the spectrum of support to develop the following:

Theory underpinning the spectrum:1

• Pathways approach — understanding the causes and effects of homelessness (including definitions of homelessness);
• Youth focussed practice — young people require differentiated and targeted responses that address their individual circumstances and needs (including an understanding of adolescent development);
• Interdependence — it is the whole community’s responsibility to provide supportive environments and structural assistance to young people until they can access the full benefits of adulthood;
• Early intervention to prevent long term homelessness — better understanding of the policy and program implications of early intervention and prevention.

Intervening Early

The Census data between 2001 and 2006 found a decrease in the numbers of homeless young people between the ages of 12 to 18. Much of this decrease has been attributed to the increase in early intervention services (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, Counting the Homeless 2006).

Current national and state government homelessness agendas have had a strong focus on rough sleeping. However, rough sleeping is mainly an adult issue. The data has clearly identified that most young people are in secondary homelessness either in youth shelters or couch surfing.

This means that homeless young people are more likely to be:

• in school and sleeping on friends’ couches and moving from friend to friend;
• in a youth shelter and on income support; or
• in an apprenticeship or traineeship and living in a tent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Queensland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 12</td>
<td>12,133</td>
<td>2,914</td>
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<tr>
<td>12–18</td>
<td>21,940</td>
<td>4,469</td>
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<td>19–24</td>
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<td>25–34</td>
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<td>35–44</td>
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<td>55–64</td>
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<td>3,667</td>
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<td>65 or older</td>
<td>7,400</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>104,676</th>
<th>26,782</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N%</td>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Early intervention is vital in mitigating against young people becoming homeless in later life. In the Queensland Implementation Plan there has been little focus on the expansion of the Youth Support Coordinator Program (a support program for young people in secondary education) or any augmentation of the Reconnect Program.

For this reason we need a Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan so that mainstream responses in the areas of health, education and legal services do not neglect the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and to assist in meeting the national target to halve overall homelessness by 2020.

Focus on Disadvantaged Young People

There are some groups of young people that face particular hardships due to cultural or social factors, for example:

- Indigenous young people who are living in substandard or overcrowded conditions;
- culturally or linguistically diverse young people who may have language difficulties, difficulties in learning new cultural norms and who have the need to understand a different political and social system and indeed the homelessness service system, and
- lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young people.

Homelessness is often also considered a ‘city’ problem. While there are higher densities of homeless people in the city areas in Queensland, most of Queensland’s homelessness are in rural and regional communities.

A Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan would utilise needs based planning and data and should be able to ensure the prioritisation of the needs of particular groups of young people.

Other Key Linkages

The White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home, had three key themes:

- Turning off the Tap
- Improving and Expanding Services, and
- Breaking the Cycle.

We have already articulated how a Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan can address the themes of Turning off the Tap and Breaking the Cycle.

In terms of ‘Improving and Expanding Services’, the Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan can assist in service integration and collaboration between specialist youth homelessness services and mainstream services both at a practice and policy level.

At the policy level joint planning work can commence with regard to COAG priorities such as National Education Agreement and Government priorities such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009 to 2020 and how these relate to youth homelessness.

Conclusion

In Queensland there is a trend to have a generic response to homelessness. However, it is clear that young people’s life stages and the particular barriers that they face require a targeted and specific response. A focus on young people would not only limit the slide into adult homelessness, it would also be more cost effective.

In Queensland we are calling for a Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan that will:

- strengthen and build upon the foundations that are currently in the State — i.e. specialist youth homelessness services, Youth Support Coordinators, Innovate Youth Health Services for homeless young people and the recent Youth Connections Program;
- develop seamless service systems that wrap around the young person;
- increase the understanding of youth homelessness, and
- focus on youth specific resourcing strategies.

The NSW and Victorian Governments have recognised the need for supporting a community based youth sector resourcing position. The Queensland Youth Housing Coalition has called on the State Government to fund a similar position. Currently the Queensland Government does not provide any financial support to the youth homelessness peak in Queensland.

The White Paper on Homelessness has recognised that there is need for the community and government to work together to address homelessness. A Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan can address the key youth targets in the White Paper such as:

- Increasing by 25% the number of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness that are provided with improved housing stability and engaged with family, school and work;
- Increasing by 25% the number of children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness that are provided with additional support and engaged in education, and
- Reducing by 25% the number of people exiting care and custodial settings into homelessness.

Footnote

1. Drawn from the Victorian Government Creating Connections, Youth Homelessness Action Plan, Stage 2
'If I Had My Kids, I’d Be Rich': Homelessness and Child Removal

By Dr Tamara Walsh and Dr Heather Douglas, TC Beirne School of Law, The University of Queensland

When you interview people who are homeless about policing, you expect to hear stories about the regulation of public spaces. What you don’t expect is to hear stories about the regulation of family life.

In 2007, a study was undertaken in Queensland which was intended to be about public nuisance, move-on powers and other uses of police powers amongst those experiencing homelessness. Yet, when asked ‘can you tell me about some of your experiences with police officers?’, many respondents (all of whom were present at a homelessness service) wanted to talk about the role that police officers had in the removal of their children. Based on these unexpected research findings, we undertook a study that investigated child protection intervention in families experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation.

The study involved five focus groups with 32 workers, including community lawyers and community service providers, whose client base was comprised of parents (mostly mothers) ‘known’ to ‘The Department’ (that is, Queensland’s former Department of Child Safety, now Child Safety Services within the Department of Communities). These workers consistently described situations where The Department had failed to provide the support that mothers needed to bring about protective outcomes for their children. Instead, mothers who found themselves unable to materially provide their children, either because they were homeless or otherwise could not make ends meet, were considered to have failed in their protective duties. This meant their children were considered to be ‘at risk’ and, in many cases, they were removed and placed in out of home care. Indeed, one worker said:

‘I’ve known some people who have rung the Department looking for help — people who’ve actually thought that the Department would give them some help with their situation — and instead they find their kids being removed.’

The workers who participated in our study told of numerous situations in which children had been removed for reasons associated with homelessness and poverty. When this occurs, parents must satisfy the Department that they have addressed their poverty or homelessness if they are to get their children back. This can prove extremely difficult. One worker said:

“We had one client whose children were removed only for a few months, but in that time, she lost her income support which she needed to pay for her housing. The Department of Child Safety were saying you need to maintain housing if you want the children returned.’

Mothers are thus caught in a circular situation which cannot be resolved: they need an income and a house to get their children back, but they lost their income and their housing when their children were removed. For women who have faced domestic violence situations and are living in a refuge, this is a common scenario. One worker commented:

‘Initially we had a couple of cases where [child safety] considered a shelter a ‘home’. Partly because they’d been there three months. And also we guaranteed to house them, as well… But other [child safety] workers have considered a refuge ‘homeless’, and they will absolutely not give [mothers’] children back when they’re at refuge until they find something permanent.’

It seems that poverty and homelessness are being conflated with ‘neglect’. Of course, there is a long history of this. Yet, in systems which purportedly promote ‘early intervention’ and which suggest that child removal should be an intervention of last resort, it is alarming that this occurs.

Part of the difficulty may be that child safety officers in Queensland lack explicit legislative powers to intervene in ways that do not involve child removal. However, the workers in our study felt that there is a culture amongst child safety officers which encourages, or at least allows for, ‘hypervigilence’. This may stem, at least in part, from the lack of experience of child safety officers, who are often young graduates from more privileged backgrounds. Participants said:

“I think middle class people or people who have no experience of poverty do not know what the degrees of difficulty are so, when they see a situation, they make an assumption about what’s happening there, and they make a value judgement about the safety of the children. So someone might not be too bad — there might be a bit of stuff happening but they’re coping quite well with the situation comparatively. But someone coming in from a white middle class family, who’s never had to go hungry, might just go “oh my god, that’s disgusting.”’

“They make judgements coming from their own values like “well the house is dirty”... the house might be dirty, because she’s trying to survive alone. Young mothers are not meant to be alone — there’s supposed to be a community where you help people. But it’s like, don’t look at the dirty house, look at the beautiful photos of grandma and mum and the babies. And the love.’

Of course, the pressures imposed upon child safety officers by their superiors, and society at large, is undeniable. Yet to be effective, responses must consider the needs of individual families. Mothers need to be asked, not told, what might help. The system that would result under these conditions need not be more costly. Placing children in out of home care is extremely expensive, yet the number of children in out of home care has risen astronomically over the past decade. Further, many community services implement effective early intervention strategies that are supportive of families with very limited funds.

The workers who participated in our study outlined many ways in which they believed at risk’ families could be assisted.

From their experience, they said:

‘There was a mother I helped the other day. Now she is a capable girl but her mattresses the kids slept on were all yucky, and she has no sheets. So we sent over some mattresses with mattress protectors and bought sheets and things... Just those basic things make the person feel better, that they are able to cope.’

‘She gets behind with the housework, she can’t buy groceries — they don’t have a car — so all these sort of simple things — buying groceries, helping with the housework — these are all really practical things which can help make them feel better.’

If you gave the women the house, and the money, and the pram that you gave the foster carers, she’d actually be able to do a lot better, and be able to look after her children.’

In the 2007 study on policing mentioned earlier, one father whose children had been removed said: ‘I’m poor. But if I had my kids, I’d be rich’. For parents who are homeless or unable to make ends meet, their children may be all they have. And for children, their parents may be all they need.

Legal Health Checks: A Targeted Response to Legal Need

By Sue Garlick, QPILCH Homeless Persons’ Legal Clinic and Rachel Watson, Mission Australia*

Legal Health Checks at Roma House, Brisbane are changing the way that lawyers and caseworkers respond to the legal needs of homeless clients.

Most workers on the “front-lines” of homelessness will appreciate the deep connection between homelessness and legal issues. The White Paper, Green Paper and recent update, Along the Road Home all refer to the need for legal services for this demographic. Legal problems can be present at the “start” of homelessness if a health crisis impacts employment and the resulting income loss destabilises accommodation. An ill-considered government decision can worsen rather than prevent a crisis.

Once homeless, clients experience a range of legal issues including police move-on powers; exposure to police attention for begging, public urination, alcohol consumption and other public nuisance offences; predatory credit and consumer practices; dodgy accommodation operators; theft of personal possessions and disproportionate fine burdens. It is almost impossible for anyone to sustain community living without these issues being addressed.

Free legal help for people experiencing homelessness has always been available through state Legal Aid services, especially for criminal charges and family relationship matters. However, grants of aid have gradually been withdrawn for civil matters, and defended “street” offences. Furthermore the success rate of homeless clients engaging with Legal Aid is limited by their own chaotic circumstances and survival priorities.

Community Legal Centres have also been a source of assistance for this client group, but many CLCs are constrained financially from offering full legal representation to clients.

The Homeless Persons’ Legal Clinic (HPLC) seeks to plug some of these “access to justice” gaps. The four “gap fillers” of the HPLC model are pro bono — harnessing the resources of private legal firms, whose corporate lawyers trained and supervised by the HPLC; outreach — located where clients are accessing essential services; addressing civil legal needs — such as debt, challenging government decision-making, tenancy disputes; and full legal representation — not just advice, but casework and court work, supplemented by pro bono barristers.

Despite the successes of this model, with the HPLC in Queensland serving 400 new clients each year, there are still limitations. One limitation of the HPLC model is that despite offering free and accessible lawyers, the client may not recognise that their issue is a “legal issue”, or that a lawyer is the person who can help. A client may seek help for the issue from a case-worker, but caseworkers are rarely resourced to consider the complicated tangles of their client’s legal issues.

Limitations of this nature have been well-documented in Australia by the Law and Justice Foundation in New South Wales. Their three pieces of research on legal need in disadvantaged communities found that:

• Many homeless people turn to a non-legal service for help, when they have a legal problem;

*
Caseworkers play a vital role in assisting homeless people to identify their legal issues, obtain legal assistance, engage in legal processes and manage their legal outcomes;

Non-legal service providers and caseworkers need access to timely legal information, legal advice and relevant legal “education”;

Traditional legal advisers were sought in only 12% of the 50% of matters where some help was sought for a legal issue;

Caseworkers attending a legal appointment with a client is beneficial to keep the client calm and to monitor comprehension levels;

Beneficial to equip non-legal workers to at least be able to appropriately refer clients who have legal problems to legal assistance services;

Building relationships between the legal and non-legal sectors, which recognise the key role of non-legal workers as a pathway to justice, has potential to improve the access to justice for socially and disadvantage people, particularly those with complex needs, including sometimes overwhelming legal and non-legal problems.

The response of the HPLC in Queensland to this “double knowledge-gap” of both clients and case-workers was to develop and pilot Legal Health Checks. Rather than applying a traditional “legal model” of information gathering, which relies on the client (or their caseworker) knowing their need and therefore “giving instructions”, the Legal Health Check adopts a “medical model” of assessing and diagnosing legal need.

The content and structure of the screening tool was developed out of the HPLC’s strong understanding of the matters they regularly assist clients with. One of the HPLC foundational firms had already begun developing standardised questions for legal matters as part of their role in a phone-based HPLC. Freehills, the firm that committed lawyers for the Roma House HPLC, also committed time and staff to produce the screening tool.

With a generous grant from StreetSmart in the 2009 round, Legal Health Checks commenced at Roma House, in August 2009. Roma House, managed by Mission Australia, provides emergency supported accommodation to chronically homeless clients in Spring Hill, Brisbane. Developed as a “therapeutic community” for chronically homeless clients who have been excluded from standard emergency accommodation, it has seen some excellent outcomes for clients who have spent years on the services roundabout.

Each resident at Roma House must participate in a compulsory medical and housing check. The Legal Health Check dovetailed with that goal-setting process. Caseworkers liaise closely with the legal screening process, sometimes sitting in, sometimes assisting clients to receive and understand correspondence, ensuring clients attend court appointments and know what to expect at those appointments, based on information from lawyers.

The aims of the Legal Health Check pilot were to:

1. Develop a screening tool that could diagnose legal need in clients, particularly in the areas of debt, housing, crime and family and children matters, and guardianship orders.
2. Screen all clients of Roma House, and then provide free legal assistance to address the needs identified.
3. Train caseworkers to identify legal need of clients and develop a basic understanding of solutions available.

A few HPLC volunteer lawyers from Freehills attend Roma House one morning each week, with a list of appointments made in consultation with Roma House staff. There are often one or two new clients, and some follow-up appointments with existing clients. Some clients have come “off the street” that morning, others are still in their pyjamas.

Caseworkers almost immediately began to report the benefits of the service and the model, such as:

• Hope for clients with seemingly impossible legal tangles.
• Armed with explicit information on court procedure by the lawyers, caseworkers became comfortable attending court to support clients, which in turn, motivated clients to attend.
• Previous fruitless attempts at advocacy by caseworkers with uncooperative accommodation operators or government agencies were replaced with the “power” of legal letterhead, conserving precious caseworker hours.
• The professional approach and respect that the lawyers offered the residents reinforced the “therapeutic community” goals of Roma House.
• As clients reported successful outcomes to other residents, they in turn, became more engaged with the lawyers.

The Legal Health Check process is providing comprehensive coverage of many outstanding and long-standing legal issues for each Roma House client. It is not dependent on client or caseworker awareness, but it builds awareness and motivation for all stakeholders in the process.

It assures caseworkers that clients leave Roma House with all their legal needs addressed in some measure. Exiting residents can return to Roma House, or attend other HPLCs for new or continuing legal issues. The motivation to do so is higher, having experienced the benefits and relevance of legal assistance.

The partnership between Freehills, QPILCH and Roma House was recently celebrated as part of a regular Roma House caseworker meeting. Representatives of the firm brought afternoon tea for the staff and shared stories of how they benefited from the experience whilst caseworkers presented a power-point of client stories.

There was a mutual understanding that this effort was returning real change to these residents.

Two of the power-point slides are shared here:

Client One: History of homelessness, Family loss, depression and frequent hospitalisations for suicides. “QPILCH made things easier for me when I was really stressed out”. The lawyers helped to secure belongings from previous accommodation, obtained a refund for a key, and assisted with negotiating a payment plan for previous accommodation debts — all small matters, but which gave the client control and satisfaction.

Client Two: Experienced PTSD, minimal access and contact with children, long-term homelessness, alcohol dependency, and DV issues. “Without assistance from QPILCH I would have struggled to get through this. It has given me back confidence.”

Client required support after experiencing a distressing police intervention which led to a charge of assault police. HPLC lawyers and barristers assisted client to defend the charges, which were resolved by mediation and dismissed. Lawyers ensured client knew when and where to attend and what to expect.

Client is now in housing, working actively to reunification with children and volunteering at Roma House. Client told lawyers at the last court mention that they wanted to “do what you guys do — it’s meant so much to me”.

The HPLC is now seeking to expand the Legal Health Check, with its diagnostic model and close partnership with caseworkers, to other clinics and services.

The Queensland Department of Communities has recently provided funding to enable this.

* Sue Garlick is the Policy Coordinator with the Queensland HPLC, and Rachel Watson is the Manager of Roma House.

Footnotes

1. The HPLC/HPLS operates in Victoria, Queensland, NSW and South Australia. In Queensland it is a project of QPILCH, the Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House, a Community Legal Centre focussed on harnessing the pro bono resources of private law firms. See www.qpilch.org.au
A Crisis Unrecognised: The Invisibility of Women’s Homelessness

By Carol Birrell, Spiritus, Group Manager, Homelessness Services Women and Children*

Hidden or Invisible?

Historically women experiencing homelessness have a reputation for invisibility. They are often hidden within the shadows and not recorded as a significant section of the homeless population. Some of the reasons for this are:

• their lack of immediate dependents which can enable greater freedom;
• their transiency through existing or newly found social connections, and
• the use of couch surfing, rough sleeping and avoiding public places and their difficulty in finding any possible place to temporarily call home.

At times, these women remain hidden for reasons of privacy, for safety reasons and to retain what little self worth they may have left or to simply avoid attention, embarrassment, discrimination or stigma.

The need to fully understand the nature, character, causes and consequences of this “invisibility” is critical if we are seeking to break the cycle of homelessness for women.

However, as O’Grady and Gaetz (2004: 411) argue, “hidden homelessness is a more common experience for women than is absolute homelessness (compared with men) in large part due to the dangers they face (including sexual assault).”

Directly related to homeless women’s invisibility are their feelings of loss, guilt, and shame in their ongoing struggle with homelessness. These feelings may lead to women concealing their homelessness, avoiding shelters, day centres and public spaces where they may potentially feel humiliated and ashamed (Edgar and Doherty, 2001: 228).

Psychological trauma must not be underestimated nor overlooked in the part it can play in contributing to and keeping women homeless and in further perpetuating the cycle of invisible and ongoing homelessness (Hodder, Teesson and Buhrich, 1998; Robinson, 2004).

Women’s Homelessness in Context

The context of single women’s homelessness in Brisbane is shaped by a number of underpinning problems and issues which include:

• the lack of women’s only crisis accommodation facilities designated for single women or women unaccompanied by a partner or children;
• mounting pressure on existing inner-city accommodation services and related inner-city support services in the areas of mental health and drug and alcohol dependence and general health;
• the most vulnerable of single homeless women in crisis with complex needs being most likely to be without safe accommodation;
• a reinforcement of women’s displacement and disconnection from familiar home territory and from key supports, family, health care, education and employment because of the lack of local service provision, and
• a reinforcement of single women’s unsafe survival skills contributing to further risk, trauma, and cycles of homelessness.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in Queensland on Census night 2001, 41% of those identified as homeless were women against 59% men and in the 2006 Census the statistics were 42% women against 58% men. The national gender distribution showed that of the people identified as homeless on Census night 2006, 56% were men and 44% women.

Although the number of people and rate of homelessness for inner-city Brisbane had declined from 2108 (316/10,000 people) in 2001 to 2070 in 2006 (248 per 10,000 people), the number of rough sleepers in inner-city Brisbane increased by an alarming 60% during this period. The greater Brisbane region also showed an alarming 79% people identifying as homeless.

The plight of single women 18 years and over in crisis and experiencing homelessness has continued to increase since the 1970’s. In 1999, 55% of people experiencing homelessness in Australia and seeking assistance were women (Casey 2002). The mask of invisibility over the past 10 years is gradually diminishing and exposing the reality of the situation for these women.

The question that needs to be examined is: What is the best way forward to respond to women presenting to homelessness specialist services in crisis?

It is well established that women only accommodation is necessary given the complexity of their needs, their vulnerability and their past experiences of abuse coupled with being in crisis (e.g. Catherine Robinson and Rose Searby 2006, Accommodation in Crisis Forgotten Women in Western Sydney). This is particularly the case with single homeless women.

In 1976, the Anglican Women’s Hostel began identifying and addressing the need to provide specialist accommodation and support services specific to the needs of women in crisis who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The hostel continued to be the solitary service provider (14 beds) in the inner city Brisbane area from 1976 until Pindari Women’s opened a women’s only service in 2004 (17 beds), and Roma House commenced in 2005 (15 beds) to offer similar services with dedicated beds to women experiencing crisis and homelessness. Today, this is unchanged, with of total of 46 beds dedicated to single women experiencing homelessness and in crisis.

During the 2008–09 period, both the Anglican Women’s Hostel and Pindari Women’s reported a turn away rate in excess of 90 women per month due to no vacant beds. In 2010 it is not uncommon...
for the Anglican Women’s Hostel to turn away 10 women in a single day. These services can only provide a quality response to 46 women at any one time in Brisbane’s inner city district. At the same time, services for men provide more than four times the response capacity than women’s services are able to provide.

Clearly there is a need to redress this imbalance of service response capacity.

Towards a Systems Approach

The Australian Government’s White Paper on Homelessness The Road Home seeks to promote the development of new service responses to homelessness. This includes:

• A holistic systems approach involving mainstream and specialist homelessness services and shared responsibility for identifying and addressing homelessness;
• A continuum of response — from prevention, early intervention, crisis, transitional and mainstream services, and
• Investment underpinned by service system reform.

A systems approach is one that views the ‘components’ as parts of an overall system, rather than reacting to specific part, outcomes or events and potentially contributing to further development of unintended consequences. Systems’ thinking is not looking at one issue but a set of practices and processes that influence one another within a whole.

To this end, I look forward to the day when the sector moves away from a silo approach and has a clearer understanding of the “holistic” or “whole of issues” responses necessary to address the causes of women’s homelessness. A collective understanding and response to all the issues experienced by women who are homeless, needs to be implemented for the women to receive the benefit of a “system response”. To break the cycle of homelessness it is critical to take into account the complexity of the issues experienced and the need to for a better understanding of the needs of women in crisis. The pathway out of homelessness for women in crisis should be through specialist crisis services that are well equipped and adequately resourced to address the immediate and ongoing needs of women.

There is and never will be a simple quick fix solution to chronic, long term or situational homelessness. Under current funding arrangements specialist services are provided with a 13 week timeframe to respond to women in crisis. However, maybe a paradigm shift is needed to recognise that crisis is an individual’s perception or experience that may take longer than anticipated to overcome and will not necessarily fit the societal or funding timeframe. After crisis, a full suite of flexible options should be offered and made readily available to the women.

The challenge now lies with the State and Federal Governments’ to take responsibility to:

• acknowledge the complexities and limitations placed on women’s crisis accommodation and support services;
• fully fund existing women’s specialists crisis services, therefore reflecting the true cost of delivering current services, and
• increase the funding base to enable women’s services to grow which would therefore redress the inequity between women’s and men’s crisis accommodation.

When these issues and acknowledgements are examined and redressed the sector will be better positioned to support women experiencing homelessness or at risk.

* Carol Birrell oversees Spiritus, Homelessness Services for Women and Children, incorporating the Anglican Women’s Hostel providing crisis support and accommodation for adult single women, St Mary’s Support and Accommodation Program targeting single 16–25 year old pregnant and parenting women with children up to 4 years, Alina provides providing crisis support and accommodation for adult single women with intellectual/learning impairment.

The full list of References used in this article can be obtained from www.chp.org.au/parity
HIP HOP — Scratching for Housing: Where are the Young Women in the Homelessness Implementation Plan?

By Maria Leebeek, Executive Officer, Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc and Talei Rice Zig Zag Young Women’s Resource Centre

Young, hidden and homeless is an accurate reflection of the situation of young people in the current housing debate. It is also more than likely that the face of homelessness in Queensland is that of a young woman. The data clearly shows that young women are a high risk group in the homeless population. Nevertheless, the Queensland Homelessness Implementation Plan remains largely silent on the issue of how we can better support them.

As a result, the Young Women’s Housing Group is calling for a Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan and within it, a targeted response to young women.

Where did the Young Women’s Housing Group Come From?
Who are we? Commencing in 1992, we are members of the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition who have a shared concern around issues facing young women and their housing experiences.

The Young Women’s Housing Group (YWHG) recognises the unique needs of young women when accessing emergency and crisis accommodation in Queensland. The YWHG understands the structures, both global and local, that contribute young women’s homelessness.

The YWHG feels it is important to ensure that young women’s homelessness is given a voice, as young women are over represented in our specialist youth homelessness services system.

Young women also come into homelessness younger and for longer periods than their male counterparts. However, this article is not intended to minimise the importance of homelessness among young men in Queensland.

The YWHG wanted to find out whether the available data supported some of the experiences that young women and services were finding when trying to access accommodation services. Towards this end, the first piece of work we undertook was a gendered analysis of the data. We focussed on the 2006 to 2007 as this enabled us to cross correlate the data.

A Gendered Analysis of Data — what did we find?

Who are the young women in Queensland?

For this gendered analysis the YWHG defined young women as being aged between 12 and 24 years of age. However, at times the data only enabled us focus on young women between 16 to 24 years old.

In the 2006 census, young women made up around 17% of the population of all women in Queensland. Young women in Queensland are as diverse in their lifestyles, goals and aspirations as any other group in society. However, young women and accompanying children make up over a third of all homeless people in Queensland (see Table 2).

Young women are the highest users of homeless services

Whilst the data shows that there is a small difference between the percentage of men and women in the homeless population, what is of interest is that the data from the 2006 Census shows that the only time young women make up a larger proportion than young men in the homeless population is when they are between 12 to 18 years of age (see Table 1).

When coupled with SAAP data that shows that young women in the 15 to 19 year age bracket make up the largest cohort of all SAAP clients, we can certainly assume that young women have high help seeking behaviours in their adolescent years.

Representation of Indigenous and refugee migrant young women in homelessness services

The data also demonstrated that Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sections of the homeless population.

There are some important differences to note with regard to Indigenous women compared to the non-Indigenous women. The median age for an Indigenous woman is 21.1 years compared to 37.2 years for non-Indigenous women. There is a higher Indigenous teenage fertility rate at 70.0 babies per 1,000 women, compared to a general Queensland teenage fertility rate of 23.0 babies per 1,000 women (source ABS trends in Indigenous fertility rates 2008).

<table>
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<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kimberly* is a 24 year old woman who has two children aged 7 and 5. Kimberly has been living in her car since the February of this year.

A usual day for Kimberly looks like this…

After an uncomfortable sleep in her car, Kimberly gets the girls ready for school, Kimberley then returns to school and collects her children, and spends time with them, Kimberley travels to collect one child from her ex-partners home to join her other child who sleeps at another family members house.

Kimberley is making to gain housing so they can live their lives more normally, Kimberley has been living in her car since the February of this year.

After Kimberley has dropped the children at school, her day consists of going to her Housing Support Worker, contacting Child Safety Services and accessing counselling for them as a family group to help them come to terms and deal with their situation.

Future Directions

The work so far by the YWHG has demonstrated that young women access specialist youth homelessness services at a very young age. It could be surmised that as young women start to mature, they are making informed decisions about their living situation, with many leaving home due to family violence and conflict issues.

What is of concern is that the data on young women in their early twenties and thirties demonstrates that they are increasingly likely to experience domestic violence — with the data clearly showing that women in their thirties being at the highest risk of being killed by an intimate partner (source: AIC report, Monitoring reports 01, J. Dearden and W. Jones, Homicide in Australia: 2006–07 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report).

The data raises a number of questions that require further investigation:

- What are the long term impacts on homeless young women, especially when they are the primary care giver, as a result of their lack of access to education, training and employment opportunities?
- If homeless young women are socially excluded due to their homelessness are they at risk of finding themselves financially dependent on a partner?

**What young women’s homelessness looks like?**

In Queensland the census found that most people experiencing homelessness were living with friend or relatives. There were also more people than the national average sleeping rough and less accommodated in Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services.

**Services that work with young women in Queensland**

A major issue was highlighted when the YWHG examined the number of services that worked specifically with young homeless women.

What we found was that only 6% were targeted specifically to young women.

**Table 2: SAAP data: SAAP clients: age, by sex, Queensland 2006–2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group (years)</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>66 years and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–64 years</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>55–59 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>50–54 years</td>
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<td>45–49 years</td>
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<td>40–44 years</td>
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<td>35–39 years</td>
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<td>30–34 years</td>
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<td>25–29 years</td>
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<td>20–24 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>15–19 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 15 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3: Census 2006 Percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous in different sectors of the homeless population, Queensland.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boarding house (N=5,438)</th>
<th>Friends of relatives (N=12,946)</th>
<th>SAAP (N=3,128)</th>
<th>Improvised dwellings (N=5,165)</th>
<th>All (N=26,677)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous</td>
<td>91.6</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>78.1</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Figures have been adjusted for missing data on Indigenous status except in 105 cases where there was inadequate information to make the adjustment.
• Does their homelessness situation make them ultimately more at risk of being killed by an intimate partner?

The data also raises some key question to services and policy makers:
• How can we better respond to young women especially in the younger age bracket?
• How are we responding to young women in the 15-19 age bracket when they enter into the homeless service system?
• What improved service responses can we develop to address issues of social exclusion?

• How can we assist young women to be financially independent?
• Should there be more housing and support services targeted specifically to young women and their children?

Conclusion

The YWHG has taken the first step in trying to answer these questions through a survey that explores access issues for young women to specialist youth homelessness services. However, a lot more needs to be done both at practice and policy level!

When considering the key themes of the White Paper such as Turning off the Tap, Improving and Expanding Services to End Homelessness and Breaking the Cycle, the critical issue is whether the Queensland funding response meets the needs of young women and their children. We believe that for this to happen, there has to be Queensland Youth Homelessness Action Plan to ensure a planned and considered approach to youth homelessness, a Plan which must include responding to the needs of young women and children.
Defining ‘Drop In’ on the Road Home

By Adam Barnes,
Homelessness and Housing Coordinator,
Brisbane Youth Service

Introduction

The Federal Government’s White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness delivered some big goals for ending homelessness. What does such aspirational policy mean for a Brisbane based Specialist Youth Homelessness Service and for young people in Queensland?

Phrases like ‘turning off the tap’, ‘breaking the cycle’, ‘no wrong door’ and ‘no exits to homelessness’ are pieces of the policy puzzle and also reflect, and are underpinned by, some well worn principles and theory (e.g. access, equity, targeted intervention, collaboration and safety). This is where the real interest lies. Once again we are presented with an opportunity for services like ours to reflect on how we work and on the outcomes achieved for the young people with whom we work.

This article documents our reflection on the Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) Drop-In model. This model is examined in the context of the above principles and a vision for ending homelessness.

The first important thing to acknowledge is that while this article spotlights one program model, Drop-In exists as part of an integrated network of BYS programs and important local services.

BYS has a culture of questioning and evaluating its services. However, it is Drop-In that is often the most questioned and debated because of its centrality within the agency and because the ‘crisis’ work that can occur in this service type can be difficult and have a significant impact on both staff and young people. To some extent, ‘Drop In’ is also debated because of its very name, a term that is often associated with older welfare models and not a modern framework of service.

Brisbane Youth Service

To give some additional context to this reflection, it is important to introduce BYS as a whole.

BYS is Brisbane’s oldest youth service and has been working with homeless and at risk young people and young families since 1977. It was started as a detached youth work model with no centre based focus at all. Since its inception, detached youth work (or public space based outreach), centre based work and home based outreach have remained core components of the work of our service.

BYS meets the spectrum of need experienced by young people.

BYS currently has several specialist service teams:

- Homelessness and Housing;
- Health;
- Young Families;
- Youth Development;
- Training and Employment;
- Youth Connections and Youth Enterprise (for more information visit www.brisyouth.org)

The Housing and Homelessness team is funded to provide a Specialist Homelessness Service, previously SAAP. This team offers a Transitional Housing Program, a Centre Based Assessment and Referral (CBAR) position and coordinates the Drop-In program (although all staff participate on the roster that resources this service).

So what does Drop-In offer, particularly in the modern policy context?

Walk into BYS on any given afternoon and you will see between 15 and 40 young people sitting on couches, in the courtyard or at computers, chatting to each other or to staff, using phones, cooking, washing clothes or waiting to have a shower. Spend some more time and you will see diverse groups of young people sharing an environment filled with laughter, frustration, sadness, camaraderie, anxiety, exhaustion and playfulness.

Look closer still and competing demands become apparent in what can be a complex balancing act in play. You will see an agency juggling young people’s immediate needs, e.g. food, transport, somewhere to sleep, with safe and positive social inclusion needs and with brief intervention work e.g. sourcing ID, long term housing applications, negotiation with landlords.

All this happens within a broader framework based on building effective working relationships that can facilitate support for young people in a coordinated, ongoing way. The obvious question is: have we got the balance right?

Access, Equity and Targeted Intervention

Including a Drop In program as a core component of an organisation’s service model presents tremendous opportunities and challenges. Achieving this part of the balancing act is about the delivery of timely interventions to the most people. Drop-In at BYS works well when it exemplifies ‘no wrong door’. For us, this means it effectively engages diverse groups of young people (couch surfers, rough sleepers, those living at home or those living independently) and makes the most of this access by seeing and acting on opportunities to divert individuals away from homelessness.

There are no exclusion criteria determining young people’s access, apart from an acceptable behaviour code to help maintain a safe environment. We expect (not accept) negative behaviour at times from those young people most in need and will modify our engagement to ensure the safety and well-being of all. Young people however, can access this space without needing to be at any particular point of readiness for service. They can access and engage with a service in a gentle introductory manner and use what they need whilst warming up to more in depth service if necessary.

BYS Drop-In can and does act as ‘the door’ for many other services (both external and internal non ‘specialist homelessness programs’ e.g. health services,) to engage and work with young people who would otherwise be marginalised by barriers to access. Whilst interventions can be questioned due to their somewhat opportunistic nature, every day we see a service is being delivered without which it is probable that none would be. It is really a harm minimisation model of intervention.

Open access Drop-In can be chaotic due to competing needs, the numbers of young people and a rotating staff system. Arguably, this can mean that not all opportunities for young people are always picked up. In 2008, BYS introduced the Centre Based Assessment and Referral (CBAR) position to provide continuity.

This position works five shifts a week to provide a big picture view of people’s changing circumstances and allow deeper engagement. This role is key to linking engagement with brief intervention work and with planned, ongoing support work.

Centre based work has been diversified so that afternoons are open to all young people to access, with three or four staff rostered on, while mornings provide young people with one-on-one time (either via prearranged appointment or walk in) to progress brief interventions and tackle the complexities of this work.

A revised structure allows us to better work with young people, regardless of their capacity to meet appointments. We are getting better at resolving primary issues early, at targeting support including emergency relief and brokerage and at grabbing with both hands, the opportunities for making sustainable change, including access to housing, as quickly as possible. We are a little closer to balancing opportunistic with quality planned support work.

Collaboration

The BYS Model of Service Delivery talks to the intent to build working relationships naturally with young people and to use this relationship to lever better outcomes. Drop-In at BYS is relationship based work that provides young people with an opportunity to work alongside staff from
across the organisation. The complexity of presenting and non-presenting issues however, presents a challenge for this service to coordinate the planning and delivery of this support work.

Drop-In works when it is integrated into the broader service system. Because BYS is a multi-program agency, the challenge of service system integration really starts here, within the organisation.

Improving service coordination has been a priority for BYS during the last 12 months. This work has involved examining when support is well coordinated, developing policy from this and designing simple tools such as practical forms and updated meeting agendas to facilitate coordinated service delivery and practice collaboration day to day.

It is early days and evidence is mostly anecdotal, but the outcomes have been robust enough to reaffirm this addition to centre based work. We have seen that where our struggle with timely intervention is successful, young people definitely benefit from improved coordination of available resources.

A rarely discussed benefit to Drop-In work in the homelessness debate is the opportunity for community development work. There is a history of community work at BYS, which is achievable simply because ‘open access’ Drop-In provides a natural environment for a community of young people to work together.

Whilst there is not time to explore this in detail here, the potential for a community of young people to address community issues is present and powerful. Of course this adds to our complex balancing act, but it also provides another reason for us to continue with a Drop-In model.

A Place of Safety

Young people without stable and consistent housing experience daily pressures and stress that are extraordinary to those who have long term, secure tenure. We know that couch surfing is under measured in the data on homelessness. It also places young people in a position of powerlessness and increased risk of harm to their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Young people tell us about the frustration and anxiety associated with living day to day, wondering where they will sleep at night or tip tooing around family and friends so that they can continue to sleep in their lounge room. They explain that ‘nowhere feels like home’, that there is nowhere they can relax or ‘let their guard down’.

Young people sleeping rough live almost all of the time in public space. This makes them obviously more vulnerable to the experience of the trauma of assault, arrest or illness. It also means that they experience the constant pressure associated with ‘life in the public eye’.

The reality for couch surfers and rough sleepers alike has played a big role in BYS deciding to maintain ‘open access’ to Drop-In each afternoon. Drop-In can provide young people in this situation with somewhere safe that is not public space or even someone’s lounge room, a somewhat basic but vital need for young people’s health and wellbeing. Part of the balancing act is to facilitate this place of respite while maintaining a capacity to target intervention work and to meet the principles of access and equity discussed above.

Are We There Yet?

The Road Home White Paper and Queensland’s renewed commitment to ending homelessness has not as yet delivered additional resources to services outside the National Partnership on Homelessness. For BYS and other services across the State, the impact thus far has largely been felt in renewed discussions against the framework provided by The Road Home. This is not to say that this policy necessarily has all the answers.

However, it does ask some of the relevant questions. It has challenged us to consider our place on the road and the effectiveness of our program models, based on some reliable principles for moving forward.

We could easily unpack and analyse any one of our programs, particularly in this context, housing models and access for young people. We chose to present the Drop In due to the limited analysis we have seen about this service model and our belief what when the balance is right within an integrated service network, it delivers solid outcomes that make it a fundamental part of the roadmap to ending homelessness. It is not perfect. It is a model like all others (old and new), that requires constant care and attention to balance competing demands and to stay true to valued theory and principles.
Chapter 3: Program, Service and Practice Responses

Three Models at Work: Simple, but Not Easy

By Rod Kelly, Manager, 139 Club

The 139 Club Inc has been operating in the Brisbane inner city for the past 35 years and has supported thousands of homeless and marginalised individuals and families in our community. It is the largest day centre for the homeless in Queensland with approximately 200 people accessing the service daily for a multitude of reasons.

The mission of this service is “to provide a safe environment in inner city Brisbane for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness to access a range of support services aimed at enhancing social inclusion”.

Grounded in Experience and Knowledge

Over the past 10 years my experience in the sector includes working with people experiencing homelessness, people with drug and alcohol issues, young people and, people with mental health problems and issues. This has enabled me to develop skills and knowledge in supporting people with high and complex needs. Through these experiences I have worked with many people, both clients and colleagues developing what I call a “practical practice focus” in supporting people to meet their needs.

In doing this it was very important to develop a broad range of skills, knowledge and networks. There is a lot of what works and a lot of what does not work out there and I am known and respected for my ability to implement practical strategies for positive change and direction. A nice saying is “let’s stop living in the problem and move to the solution”. The solution, nine times out of ten, will be a practical application requiring some tangible action to address one of the needs in the pyramid below. This tangible action will have a ripple effect through a person’s life that is quite often hard to measure but all the same, is there. The solution is often ‘simple but not easy’. This is the best way to describe the work that we do at the 139 Club. Looking at people’s situation through Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a great staring point.

The reason that the 139 Club is so successful at attracting, engaging and supporting people is due to the fact that we use simple strategies which at their core address the needs outlined in Maslow’s pyramid.

However, what needs to be examined when endeavouring to apply these strategies is that their application is different for each individual or family. Some needs are obvious and some are not so obvious. Some people need more of one thing and less of another. People are constantly trying to reinvent the wheel. Don’t we learn early in our careers that if it’s not broken why fix it? If we haven’t learned this, maybe we should. All people need their most basic requirements met in order to survive; these being, food, water, shelter, hygiene and clothing. We supply meals, showers, laundry, lockers, laundry, clothing and day beds. Simple, but not always easy. From here it gets more difficult because of vastly different individual needs and requirements. Different models of service achieve reasonable outcomes for different people.

Models that Work

The Hub Model is one that works well at the 139 Club. By this I mean visiting services and professionals attending in one place to provide services to people. For instance, the 139 Club has many and varied professionals attending at various times weekly or monthly to provide much needed care, advice and support.

Experience tells me that a large number of people accessing the 139 Club find it extremely difficult to access critical mainstream systems and that doing so creates a whole range of anxieties. There are a multitude of reasons for this, from mental illness, disabilities, drug and alcohol issues, financial concerns, trauma, and so on.

We have found that by providing these services at one location people feel safe and so they come and seek help for their...
needs. Currently onsite we have a Doctor, Nurse, Chiropractor, Counsellor, Hair Dresser, Legal Advice, Employment Services, Podiatrist, Mental health, Drug and Alcohol, Massage, Health and Fitness, Centrelink, Medicare and SPER.

The reason this works is that all these professionals work out of one centre, from one address. We are also looking for other professionals such as dentists, accountants, financial advisors to work with us through this model.

Currently most of these people volunteer their time, but as with any volunteer service it is unpredictable and is unsustainable over long the term due to the nature of volunteers and their changing commitments and circumstances.

There is a need for Government to acknowledge the outcomes of this model, to support such an initiative and to fund it properly. This may mean diverting resources or giving incentives for these professionals to attend non-government agencies like the 139 Club.

Another model the 139 Club supports is one that focuses on breaking down social isolation and growing self esteem through groups and education. Once again, simple but not easy. This model supports group activities and group workshops. The 139 Club Inc ensures that people have weekly activities to be involved in. People attending the Club feel safe to engage in different activities and have different experiences because we work from a model that builds and develops a culture of trust.

There are groups of people that go on weekly outings, including day trips and sporting activities. There are pool competitions, both internal and inter-agency. There are educational groups such as the literacy and numeracy group, an art group, diabetes workshops, healthy eating workshops, first aid courses and a peer parenting group.

These groups are so successful and improve people’s quality of life and how they feel about themselves because of the interactive components of the model that works in combination with the trust that the Hub model supports.

For the most part these groups are supported by fundraising and volunteers. This makes them vulnerable. Once again, the Government needs to look at diverting some resources and provide incentives to businesses and educational bodies to support the initiatives represented by these groups.

The development and implementation of Social Enterprise model is another important component of the work of the 139 Club. As governments and non-government agencies are acutely aware, the available funding can only stretch so far. There needs to be a swing in thinking away from welfare models towards business models that create sustainable finances. This is particularly so in a climate of increasing wages and costs.

The 139 Club was dealt a disappointing blow earlier this year when it application for some funding through the Jobs Fund to support and grow the already established 139 Club Catering Social Enterprise was unsuccessful. This enterprise employs people experiencing instability in their lives and develops a holistic support plan for them.

The successes of the 139 Club Catering Social Enterprise has not been fully recognised or supported and because of this opportunities have been lost to support more people into traineeships that would see them working towards the independence that is so often talked about as the goal of the various responses to homelessness.

Once again there is a big need to for governments to re-assess some of their funding strategies and to be readily available to support the initial growth of financially sustainable social enterprises. A more supported process needs to be developed for grass roots agencies in regard to funding rounds. Historically grass roots agencies find it very difficult to compete with large organisations. Large organisations employ whole divisions of trained people to develop and complete funding applications and in the broad scheme of things this imbalance between large and grass roots organisations means that competition for funding is not an equitable process.

Funding and Support

Up until now I have spoken about successful models that have been implemented which need to be supported in a more strategic way by Government and funding bodies.

However, I could not finish without commenting on a model that is spoken about and robustly supported in Government circles. This is a collaborative model with a focus on existing agencies working together to support the community from a holistic and broad specialist base.

The 139 Club is part of the strong “Under One Roof” consortium formed in 2006 that was developed along these lines. The organisations involved literally have hundreds of years shared experience in engaging and working with people who are homeless.

This consortium developed a strong model of collaboration and partnerships to apply for funding to house and support people experiencing homelessness. The “Under One Roof” consortium consists of eight specialist agencies in the inner city of Brisbane that when combined have hundreds of years experience when working with this particular community.

The funding guidelines had a very strong emphasis on a collaboration model approach which would suggest that agencies need to form strong partnerships to deliver these services. However, to this point, it has been difficult to obtain any substantial funding for the consortium. Nevertheless these specialist organisations are so committed to the consortium that they have pledged unfunded resources to the project to support pilot of this program.

In Conclusion

Sometimes it is necessary to be direct. I have difficulty in understanding how funding bodies justly withholding funding from the “Under One Roof” consortium that is made up of organisations who have stood the test of time and who have developed the skills and expertise in their fields over years of working in the sector and who are already working collaborative partnerships and who already have referral processes in place.

My advice to funding bodies is to look to those organisations that have existing partnerships and services and give them the opportunity to add value to the great work that they do already.
The Ozcare Supported Parole Program

By Ozcare Queensland

Background

Homelessness is not just a housing problem. Homelessness has many drivers and causes, including the shortage of affordable housing, long-term unemployment, mental health issues, substance abuse and family and relationship breakdown.

Ending homelessness requires sustained, long-term effort from all levels of Government, business, the not-for-profit sector and the community. The new National Affordable Housing Agreement, which came into effect from 1 January 2009, tailors the national response to the needs of particular groups within the homeless population.

People who experience, or who are at risk of becoming homeless should move quickly through the crisis system to long-term housing and at the same time, they should access help to reconnect them with education, employment and the community. Ozcare believes that both the specialist homelessness system and the mainstream system have roles to play to help people participate socially and economically in their communities and to maintain long-term housing.

People Leaving Prison

Established in June 2006, the Ozcare Supported Parole Program was designed to assist prisoners who would not otherwise be eligible for parole, to be given an opportunity to adapt to life in the general community and to help them establish the necessary supports that they would require to live a life free from crime. The program, developed by Ozcare and funded by Queensland Corrective Services, undertakes an assessment of each applicant’s suitability for inclusion on the program, in advance of their making a parole application. This enables the prisoner to include in their parole application, advice to the relevant Community Corrections Board that they have been assessed and would be acceptable for inclusion in the program if granted parole.

The Road Home, Homelessness White Paper, has identified that one of the ways in which homelessness can be prevented, is by addressing the structural drivers of homelessness, such as exits into homelessness by people leaving state care. Whereas it may take some time to formulate strategic approaches to preventing exits into homelessness from statutory, custodial, health, mental health and drug and alcohol services, the Ozcare Supported Parole Program is one service that has a well-developed system, providing accommodation and support plans for ‘at risk’ people nearing parole.

Support for Parolees

With the support of the Queensland Parole Board an average of 100 men per year are admitted to the program. Unless the applicant has a Court Ordered Parole, applicants are subject to consideration by a Parole Board for final approval to participate in the program. The Supported Parole Program is not a housing-only response and includes linkages with long-term supported housing, education, training, and employment assistance. The program operates on the basis of a ‘decreasing dependency’ model of support promoting the development of independent living skills through coaching and development of the necessary skills for independent daily living in an unsupervised setting. Program components are tailored to meet the individual’s needs, and typically focus on:

- personal development (problem solving, conflict resolution, building relationships, personal grooming);
- basic life skills development (food and nutrition (cooking), hygiene (personal and other cleanliness), money management, shopping, transportation, safety);
- Education and training (accessing literacy and numeracy courses, etc); and
- Employment readiness (development of resumes, accessing employment services).

Facilitating Successful Independent Living

For a number of program participants, re-engaging into the community involves venturing into unchartered territory and poses risks and a level of apprehension. Being based on a decreasing dependency support model, the program aims to provide support and reinforcement of an individual’s right to choice, independence, and self-empowerment, while helping the individual to balance preference, opportunity, choice, and responsibility.

Case Study: Tommy* — A Success Story

Tommy is an Indigenous Australian and has spent many years in custody. For six months he has been a client of Ozcare’s Supported Parole Program. Tommy had the opportunity to meet his Program Facilitator before he left prison, developing for him a level of confidence and surety about what was to come in the days and weeks ahead of him as a person on parole.

Taking a strengths-based approach to the development of Tommy’s support plan, it was quickly identified that during his years in prison the one positive constant in Tommy’s life had been his art. Tommy had donated many of his paintings to favoured charities, raising significant funds on their behalf, and through this, has become an artist of renown. Tommy was very proud that he had gifted several of his works to Crown Princess Mary on the occasion of her wedding to Crown Prince Frederick of Denmark, and that these works were still on display in Denmark and had drawn international acclaim.

Yet despite this acclaim, when Tommy left prison he did not have any form of identification, a critical element he needed to be able to function in the community. Tommy recounts, “To start with I had to go through a complicated process with Mumi Watch and the Aboriginal Elders where I came from to get a birth certificate, then I could get my ’18 Plus’ card and go from there.” For Tommy and his Program Facilitator, it has been a case of one step at a time, progressively building a sustainable platform on which Tommy could regain control of his life.

His facilitator said, “He has a very feasible plan to make a living from the sale of his artwork and all the goals are Tommy’s — Ozcare has simply worked with him to facilitate quality outcomes.” Describing the program, his Facilitator further stated, “We try to address everything the individuals need to help them rebuild a new life. We teach our clients the basics of life, help to set them up and point them in the right direction — then it’s their job to make it work.”

Tommy reports, that due to his personalised case-management and release support plan, it only took a little over six months in the program to move from having absolutely no identification, physical assets, housing or modern living skills, to being prepared to move into his own unit in the community. He has developed a range of personal and urban community survival skills, as well as some concrete, positive plans for the future. He credits this directly to the support of the Supported Parole Program, and to what he has learnt whilst in the program. Tommy believes that he now has the confidence and skills to successfully live independently in the community.

As an expression of thanks for the support that he has received from the Parole Program, Tommy created a new art piece, which he has kindly donated to Ozcare to symbolise the “healing” that he has experienced as a participant in the program.

* not his real name.
To achieve this outcome, a program participant will typically move through three phases of support, the duration of which varies depending upon individual’s progress toward identified goals.

**Phase 1. Intensive Support**

Induction; orientation; goal setting; support planning; support counselling; life-skills program participation; introduction to the concept of scheduling and organising their lifestyle to meet commitments and responsibilities. Each participant is provided with a daily planner or diary which they are required to use throughout the program.

**Phase 2. Stabilisation**

Seeking accommodation; seeking employment; establishing appropriate social activities and interests; adopting a ‘planned week’ lifestyle that reflects an appropriate balance of work and home responsibilities. Discussions with a Program Support Officer during this phase, includes review of diary entries and encouragement toward reflective learning.

**Phase 3. Self-Reliance**

Program Aims:
- A demonstrated reduction in reliance on Program Support Officers;
- self-directed accessing of relevant community supports, and
- active planning or organisation of accommodation and employment options for release to full parole.

The Supported Parole Program’s success in reducing clients’ risk of being released into homelessness highlights the importance of implementing individualised case-management, including the development a structured support plan for release. The following case study provides an example of what can be achieved by the Program.
Under 1 Roof: A Multi-Agency Response to Homelessness

By Fiona Caniglia, Under 1 Roof Project Worker

A consortium of agencies in Brisbane’s inner city recently launched a new venture to synergise and coordinate services aimed at reducing homelessness.

The Under 1 Roof (U1R) consortium offers wrap around services encompassing assertive outreach, tenancy establishment, ongoing support and social inclusion. Within these important components, U1R also offers a significant range of opportunities to people experiencing homelessness, including:

- Safe sleeping options;
- Transitional as well as long term, secure housing choices;
- Formal relationships with the private rental system creating additional housing options;
- Drug and alcohol rehabilitation services;
- Visiting services covering health, legal support and income related issues;
- Employment and training opportunities;
- Financial help spanning material assistance to budgeting and financial planning;
- Information and referral;
- Meals;
- Participation and engagement in the wider community, including volunteering;
- Recreational and social activities;
- Social enterprise;
- Tenant advocacy and advice, and Peer leadership programs which support homeless people to influence services, policy and programs.

On a systemic level, Under 1 Roof aims to:

- Improve synergies within the homeless service system;
- Develop leadership, education and advocacy skills within the workforce, and
- Generate activities and resources that engage the broader community in ending homelessness.

While many of the participating agencies were already in formal partnerships to deliver tangible outcomes to homeless people, the entire consortium was actually convened by the Rotary Club of Fortitude Valley (RCFV) wanting to generate resources to support community services in the region.

The involvement of local businesses is central to U1R and helps to ensure strong relationships with the broader community and an avenue for business and resident involvement in the solutions to homelessness. In this context, RCFV continues to work on projects aimed at generating funds for the work of U1R.

U1R currently uses two main mechanisms to achieve coordination and integration: regular case management coordination meetings and a managers’ forum. Case coordination meetings involve front line workers in negotiating practical responses to the circumstances of a homeless person or household. The managers’ forum is focussed on more strategic opportunities.
such as combined training, and advocacy in relation to policies and programs that contribute to the end of homelessness.

U1R’s coordinated effort is underpinned by a range of policies and procedures developed through funding from the Brisbane City Council. U1R draws from a substantial evidence base that multi-agency work contributes to achieving a measurable reduction in street homelessness (Randall and Brown, 2006:29):

“A key technique in all areas was a regular case conference meeting of front line agencies to agree actions on individual street homeless people. For example, in Westminster a ‘Task and Targeting’ group met weekly for around an hour and a half to plan actions on up to 70 known clients. Camden had a similar arrangement, with joint work co-ordinated by a Head of Street Population Services.”

An important feature of U1R is the collaboration between large, small, generalist and specialist agencies in a concerted effort to apply their strengths towards reducing homelessness. Already, participating agencies have played different roles depending on expertise, history and capacity.

One agency for example is working to secure office space in a prime inner city location for the work of U1R where co-location opportunities exist. Another agency has taken the lead in funding applications because it has significant infrastructure capacity as a basis for contract management. Yet another is convening the managers’ forum and others have been contracted for specific services such as graphic design and catering.

U1R is a shift beyond binary notions of the merits of small and large organisations towards a demonstration of how small and large organisations can effectively work together as a basis for ensuring that homeless people benefit from diverse contributions by a range of agencies.

The case for collaboration between generalist and specialist agencies is grounded in the documented needs of homeless people including the prevalence of drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues, poor physical health and social isolation (Randall and Brown, 2006a:1; Randall and Brown, 2006b: 4–5).

U1R includes specialist agencies with expertise in working with young people, older people and addiction issues. The consortium also includes community development expertise as a basis for strengthening the broader networks accessible to homeless people once long term housing and support are in place.

The opportunity exists to deepen a person’s connection to a place of belonging. From finding accommodation, community development work aims to build a strong affiliation with a particular place or area as a basis for rebuilding a web of relationships through which formerly homeless people find opportunities to access reciprocal and natural helping networks. People with strong local connections, an interconnected network of support services, friendships and valued roles are further away from homelessness than people who are housed but isolated.

U1R is an opportunity to think about the practical implications of a more coordinated approach and confronts the challenges of continuing to resource coordination mechanisms on a daily basis. Coordination and integration of existing resources takes time, energy and operational budget from the participating agencies.

The result is that synergy is captured and directed towards a measurable reduction in homelessness. It will be important to continue discussion and debate about the role of coordination and integration of front line service delivery with Government and with peak bodies.

Evidence, research, training and resources are also needed to promote the capacities needed for successful multi-agency approaches such as:

• “agreeing the roles and responsibilities of all participating agencies from the outset;
• effective sharing of information between agencies;
• joint training and visits between agencies, and
• an agreed individual officer or agency to facilitate the process of joint work”.

Randall and Brown, 2006a:30

U1R participants include Queensland Health Injectors’ Network, Footprints, 139 Club Inc, Brisbane Youth Service, Mission Australia, New Farm Neighbourhood Centre, the Rotary Club of Fortitude Valley and CityCare Brisbane. Brisbane Housing Company and BRIC Housing are also involved with partnerships also emerging involving West End Community House, Commuify and SANDBAG.

For more information please contact Rachel Watson on 3839 1826.

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Mission Possible: Mission Australia Services and Collaborations in Queensland

By Avryl Gratton, Operations Manager, Mission Australia Queensland, and Robyn Lawrence, Lifestyle Coordinator, Roma House

Mission Australia has played a vital role with disadvantaged and homeless people in Queensland since its operation as Brisbane City Mission which commenced services in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane in 1859.

Since that time much of the focus has continued to be on the provision of food in Fortitude Valley. However, during the past six years other services have developed as a response to community need and funding availability.

Today Mission Australia operates Café One and Roma House in central Brisbane, Nightspot in Logan City; Reconnect at Toowoomba and Gold Coast, Going Places in Cairns, and Supervised Accommodation Service in Townsville.

Mission Australia services operate within strong practice frameworks and engage in reflective learning thus creating opportunities for services to continually develop to meet the needs of clients. This article highlights some of the innovative approaches being undertaken.

Café One: A Gateway to Change

The provision of food has always been central to services provided to the homeless and marginalised in the Fortitude Valley community. It has been provided through various models from a Soup Kitchen, a Community Café and presently as Café One.

These models of service have been exemplified by acknowledging both the basic and social need and value of food, provision of a non-judgemental setting in which food is served and moving from a ‘hand out’ model to a ‘hand up’ approach which encourages and enables customers to take greater responsibility for their own life.

Alongside the provision of affordable and nutritious meals has been the provision of accessible specialist services such as welfare referral, legal advice, health assessments and practical assistance such as travel vouchers, clothing and hygiene packs.

“The strength of the engagement that occurs with customers at the Café can play a critical role in ensuring ongoing housing once people are housed. Some of its customers will require ongoing support and the trusting relationships built with staff provide a strong foundation for supporting people to both attain and maintain housing stability.”


The focus on connection and belonging provides the contextual setting in which issues can be identified and addressed. It is acknowledged that all such intervention is not provided in isolation of other services to homeless people, therefore Mission Australia works collaboratively as a member of Under One Roof, a consortium of agencies working in Fortitude Valley.

Roma House: Therapeutic Community

Roma House is a therapeutic residential community based in a Queensland Government heritage listed building in inner Brisbane. The concept and implementation of a therapeutic community has been developing over the past few years. Two aspects of this approach are the use of Adventure Based Learning Programs and the use of the kitchen to provide opportunities for connection and therapeutic conversations.

Intentional Use of Adventure Based Learning Programs to Challenge and Support Identities and Goals for Participants within Roma House’s Therapeutic Community

“I have never done anything like this before in my life and I haven’t felt this much pain in my body since child birth….I never thought I could do something like this. Nobody can take this memory away from me, I will always have it.”

55 year old participant near the end of a four-day sea kayaking expedition to Fraser Island. Six weeks previous to participation in the program the participant had endured a heart attack coupled with multiple other health concerns.

Ever wondered how engagement in an intentional therapeutic adventure based learning program could challenge and transform a Homeless person’s current canvas on life? How it may provide a legitimate and effective response to homelessness?

Roma House has been exploring the therapeutic outcomes of participation in over 20 programs involving more than 70 participants throughout the past year.

One measure of success can be gauged by the participation of approximately 75% of current and previous residents in more than one program. The programs ability to challenge dominant stories of self is another indicator of success that can be directly attributed to this unique program within the context of the therapeutic community at Roma House.

Adventure Based Learning combines adventure and outdoor environments focused on achieving therapeutic outcomes for all participants. Key principles and themes of this practice include:

- voluntary participation;
- use of a small group format;
- challenge and stress associated with participation at individually assessed levels;
- co-creating a cooperative, group based, safe social setting;
- experiential development through the encouragement of participants to become engaged with the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual experience; journey based modality;
- wilderness experiences;
- intentional therapeutic conversations;
- processing experience, reflection and sharing; stages of change, and opportunity to master difficult challenges.

It is with knowledge of these principles that clients choose to take part in the adventure based learning program.

Program intent and design are diverse depending on the individual and group needs. Programs are gender separate for multi-day adventures for all current and previous residents of Roma House. Mixed gender day programs are available for all current residents. The range of activities is expansive including:

- sea kayaking to Fraser Island;
- outdoor rock climbing and abseiling;
- canoeing to remote locations including rivers and lakes;
- intentional time in wilderness involving island and mountain locations;
"Sarah", 35, has experienced various forms and purpose. She offers an insight into the support that has been identified and shared in the therapeutic intention of the programs. Participants have been given the opportunity to regularly engage with the possible new identities. Participants have a sensory experience which challenges old needs through:

- making new friendships;
- exploring and mastering adventure activities;
- presence in wilderness to reflect with self, others and with small community;
- healthy risk taking and challenge with self, others and with social skills;
- mastery of new skills including adventure activities and life skills like cooking;
- provision of space which is drug and alcohol free, and
- nurture and development of positive social skills;
- making new positive relationships;
- mastery of new skills including adventure activities and life skills like cooking;
- provision of space which is drug and alcohol free, and
- quality time in a wilderness setting.

These experiences are supporting "Sarah" in her present situation and encouraging her to consider positive future directions.

As with any therapeutic practice, adventure based learning programs are not of interest to all potential participants. Assessment of eager participants requires approval from the case worker, Roma House nurse and the adventure based coordinator. The learnings achieved to date have been rich for both participants and staff alike. The use of adventure based learning has led to the establishment of exceptional, dynamic and meaningful programs for the benefit of individuals. This program will continue to provide support and growth meeting the needs of the homeless community through unique and meaningful practice.

The House of Plenty: A Kitchen Program Responding to Needs

The House of Plenty (aka Roma House kitchen) is an intentional therapeutic program nestled within the broader Roma House Service. As with any home the kitchen is the heart and soul of Roma House.

A central aspect of this program is that when residents connect with the kitchen, they lose themselves for the moment. They are not connected to their mental illness, their homelessness; they are not a mother, not someone just out of jail or just kicked out of a home. The kitchen is a space of peace and an amazing tool for engagement.

The kitchen doors, hearts and minds are open allowing opportunity for connection, sharing and the creation of a sense of belonging. For some this is the first time they have truly had any power over the food they eat. It’s amazing when someone cooks dinner for the whole house and everyone is telling that person how great the food tastes... their chest puffs out and you can feel their pride and satisfaction.

Some of the reasons cited by residents past and present for connecting with the kitchen are that it helps them to keep busy, helps them to avoid drugs and alcohol, they like the company, they like to create food, they want to feel useful, they believe this is their home and they want to be a part of it, to have a sense of purpose and contribution. Stories are shared around the stove, the sink and the dining table. There is laughter and weeping.

The kitchen staff group is as varied as the client group, including knowledge and experience in the areas of nutrition, social work, environment, group facilitation, mental health and community development.

Conversations are intentional in their aim to connect and provide opportunity for insight and understanding, to discuss the present and create future possibilities. But mostly there is the sharing of food, with each other and the wider community as we prepare and eat the fruits of our labour.

Concluding Thoughts

All Mission Australia services provide entry points for clients requiring assistance to address their homelessness and other related issues. While acknowledging the importance of their individual services Mission Australia believes strongest benefits can be derived when working with other service providers in a collaborative approach.

This approach enables the connection of clients with the broadest range of services and service providers, ensuring their navigation of the service system is facilitated rather than hampered.

While Mission Australia considers transferring new programs and models internally, future strengthening of collaborative approaches can provide opportunity to disseminate new and innovative programs such as the Adventure Based Learning and Kitchen Programs.

Other communities can be encouraged to consider different models of practice such as Café One. Mission Australia values the opportunity to explore and implement new programs and innovations arising from involvement in collaborations.

Mission Australia is committed to working collaboratively and is currently involved in collaboration in various communities including the active community capacity building of the Nightspot Project, creating strong working connections in communities such as Townsville and Cairns and being a member of the Under One Roof Consortium in Fortitude Valley (Brisbane).

Footnote

1. Further information about the Under One Roof Consortium can be found in the article Under One Roof: a multi-agency response.

References


Where are Queensland’s Children Sleeping Tonight?

By Heather McAllan,
Spiritus Youth Services and Karen O’Donohue,
In-SYNC Youth Services

Readers are invited to think about their own adolescence when reading these stories of the young people who access Spiritus youth accommodation services.

Who provided financial support? Who assisted with your education, looked after you when you were ill, fed you and kept you safe?

Spiritus Youth Services (SYS) and In-SYNC Youth Services are Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services that provide accommodation for young people using internally or externally supported accommodation models that assist young people to reach goals that they have identified. Counselling and support is also available to prevent young people from becoming homeless.

SYS at Beenleigh and In-SYNC at Cleveland, in Brisbane’s Bayside area predominantly work with young people who are not part of the tertiary child protection system and are not receiving support from the Department of Communities — Child Safety out-of-home care services. These vulnerable young people fall between the gaps in the system of supports and services meant to help them.

Safe, secure accommodation and a reliable source of income are the basic needs of all young people. The harsh reality is that there is extremely limited affordable accommodation available in South East Queensland. The youth allowance is awarded to those over 16 years (in special circumstances this can be awarded at 15 years). It is our experience that a number of young people who are between 13–15 years who are not eligible for youth allowance and who are not able to be supported by the child protection system, are seeking support from youth accommodation services.

These young people often have to do without the most basic items that most teenagers take for granted. The young people (aged 16 years or over) living in our medium or long term accommodation programs are often on the Youth Allowance (living away from home) and receive an income of approximately $377 per fortnight.

From this they are paying 25% for rent or around $94. This rental income provides some financial assistance to our services to meet the costs of managing the property including electricity, repairs and maintenance.

The young people have only $283 a fortnight to meet all their other living expenses; including all food and grocery items, transport, all school, TAFE or training expenses, health (doctors, dental, glasses, prescriptions, medicines), clothes, personal grooming (including haircuts and toiletries) and any sporting activities.

It is common that young people will place their health at risk due to lack of resources. Affordability means that items like healthy food, enough food, sport, doctor’s appointments, medicine, glasses and dental care become a luxury for young people accessing youth accommodation services.

These young people demonstrate ingenuity and strength, and work to overcome the obstacles in front of them one step at a time. They continue their education and gain employment. This is a testament to their resilience and their ability to succeed against all the odds.

So why is it that these young people continue to be portrayed in such a negative way by popular media? This portrayal continues to lead to a general perception by society that these young people are to blame for their own circumstances.

The Homelessness Facts for Young People in Queensland

The Australian Institute Health and Welfare (AIHW) Queensland Counting the Homeless Report 2006 found that there were 26,782 people experiencing homelessness in Australia with a disturbing 37% of these under the age of 24 years. Children under 12 years accounted for 11%, young people 12–18 years (mainly on their own) for 16% and young people 19–24 years for 10%.

In the Beenleigh region (part of the North Gold Coast) where Spiritus Youth Services (SYS) is located there were 178 people experiencing homelessness with a rate of 35 per 10,000 people who were homeless. In the Redland region, where In-SYNC youth service is based, there were 242 people experiencing homelessness in Queensland.

Amy’s Story

Amy (name changed) an Indigenous young person was taken into care by the Department of Communities — Child Safety due to her family’s inability to care for her at age 11 years. She became known to SYS at 15 after the last of several foster placements broke down. She stayed in SYS crisis accommodation for three months. Moving into our medium term accommodation after turning 16, she lived in the medium term accommodation house for seven months.

During this time it became apparent that she was struggling to cope with the responsibility that is required for medium term accommodation.

Between the ages of 16 and 17 years, Amy was able to identify when her support needs increased and the service fortunately was able to be flexible in meeting Amy’s needs and to move her back into the crisis accommodation for short periods where there is internal 24 hour support from staff.

During this time Amy successfully completed year 12, and was also involved with two of her school’s extra programs — in surf lifesaving and the Indigenous support unit. It is the staff of SYS that Amy has identified as providing her with the support to achieve her goals, and the people she felt she should be at her year 12 graduation to help her celebrate this achievement.

After completing year 12 Amy chose to leave the service. Amy entered back into a crisis period and became homeless and lived on the streets and couch surfed for about a year; in that time she continued to maintain regular contact with SYS staff.

Following this period she requested SYS to assist her in gaining medium term accommodation as she felt she was ready to again take on this responsibility. SYS assisted her in successfully applying for accommodation with another youth service. Amy successfully maintained this accommodation for 12 months and has now moved into long term accommodation; where there is minimal support and she is required to be significantly independent. Amy has maintained this for six months and is a member of the youth advisory committee for the complex.

Whilst Amy has continued to have periods of crisis through the last year and half, as she tries to address the significant issues from her past, these have reduced in both frequency and impact. Amy recently began a TAFE course and has set a goal for her future; she would like to join the defence force. Amy is now 21 and has continued to seek emotional support from SYS which Amy identifies as providing the stable base in her life over the past six years.
Jane's Story

Jane (name changed) became known to In-SYNC when she attended a program when aged 15 years. Jane maintained contact with the service accessing various programs, including the counselling program, for a year. Jane then chose to leave home due to domestic violence.

Jane couch surfed until she was able to access medium term accommodation with another youth service (at the time In-SYNC only provided male accommodation in the area).

Jane left school and went into full time employment. Jane maintained her accommodation and her job for 18 months. In that time Jane had entered into a relationship and moved into private rental with her partner. Jane’s contact with our service was sporadic during this time, mainly checking in and updating what was going on for her.

Jane re-contacted the service after a year requesting support as she had decided to return to school to complete her high school education. During this time Jane identified that she wanted to address the issues that had led to her need to leave home.

Through addressing this issue Jane was able to identify that she had entered into a relationship that had similar issues, and that she needed to leave the relationship. Our service was able to meet her needs at this time (due to recent increased service capacity) and provided her with safe accommodation. Jane maintained her employment throughout this period.

Jane exited our accommodation back into the private rental market with a friend within six months. Jane continues to maintain contact receiving emotional support, addressing her career and education options whilst dealing with the issues from her past. Jane is now 21 and identifies In-SYNC as the stable base in her life for the past six years.

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References


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Brisbane City Council and the Response to Homelessness

By the Brisbane City Council

Housing and Homelessness

In Brisbane’s inner city at least 350 people are homeless and 4,550 people live in unsafe or insecure accommodation. Brisbane City Council is addressing homelessness and affordable housing in Brisbane to create sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

Homeless Initiatives

Homeless Connect

Council, state government, businesses and community groups provide free services to the homeless for the day, such as:

- haircuts
- clothes
- accommodation information
- medical and legal advice

RecLink

Council has partnered with RecLink Australia to create RecLink Brisbane. Reclink provides sporting, social and arts activities to enhance the lives of people experiencing disadvantage.

Support for Homeless People

You can volunteer with community organisations that help the homeless everyday:

- Rosies — Friends on the Street: www_rosies.org.au
- Drug Arm: www.drugsarm.com.au
- Mission Australia: www.missionaustralia.com.au
- Salvation Army: www.salvos.org.au

Public Space Liaison Officers

Council’s team of Public Space Liaison Officers monitor public places and connect rough sleepers with vital services.

Red Cross Night Café

Previously located under City Hall, the café was opened in 2001 by Council and the Australian Red Cross. Since City Hall closed for refurbishment, the café now runs at the Albert Park Flexible Learning Centre on Hale St.

It provides Brisbane’s homeless or disadvantaged youth with free meals and access to showers, toilets and health and legal advice two nights a week. The café also runs workshops and arts-based activities.

Community Housing Partnership

Council-owned properties are available to social housing providers as crisis and transitional housing.

The Brisbane Housing Company (BHC)

The BHC is a non-profit organisation established by Council with the state government. It provides affordable rental accommodation for people on low incomes.

The BHC has over 600 units in Brisbane, with more in development.

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Homeless Connect

Homeless Connect brings together business and community groups twice a year to give free services to the homeless, or those at risk. Services include:

- medical care
- legal advice
- accommodation referral
- personal grooming items
- clothes

The project has helped over 4,200 people since Brisbane City Council held the first Homeless Connect in Australia during November 2006. Similar events are now held in Perth, Hobart, Adelaide and the Gold Coast.

May 2010

Council’s eighth Homeless Connect was held at the RNA Showgrounds on 11 May. We were able to help over 800 people at this event by providing:

- 220 haircuts
- over 200 doctors appointments, including optometrists, podiatrists and general medical
- over 50 flu vaccinations
- many other services and donations of clothing

We would like to thank all the sponsors, volunteers, service providers and Council employees for making this Homeless Connect event a success.

The next Homeless Connect event will be held in November 2010.

Community Housing Partnership Program

The Community Housing Partnership Program (CHPP) is a Brisbane City Council initiative providing social housing to people at risk of homelessness. Council currently has 37 properties allocated to the CHPP program.

The CHPP program utilises properties that are either resumed or held by Council for infrastructure projects or road works. Registered community housing providers manage each property ensuring that crisis and transitional housing needs are met.

The program has been running for the past seven years and relies on funding from the Department of Communities to upgrade and maintain the houses to an acceptable health and safety standard.

CHPP is piloting an innovative response to chronic homelessness. In partnership with Micah Projects, INCH, Mangrove Housing, BRIC Housing, and 4 Walls and the Department of Communities; long term rough sleepers are being referred directly into CHPP housing with coordinated case management and wraparound support to enable them to maintain their tenancies.

These people were previously chronically homeless and some of them were key anchors in the homeless hotspot at Riverside Drive and the previous Tent City hotspot at South Brisbane.

Since the inception of CHPP in 2003, 46 properties have provided over 175 people with housing. Tenancies have included homeless rough sleepers, people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, women and children escaping domestic violence, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people, and homeless young people.

For further information visit www.brisbane.qld.gov.au
Intensive Case Management through Homeless Outreach: Footprints in Brisbane Inc

By Carolyn Perry, Mental Health Projects Manager, Footprints in Brisbane Inc

Footprints in Brisbane Inc is a not for profit community based organisation that has been established in the inner northern suburbs of Brisbane since 1991. The Homeless Outreach Program has been operating since 2003, funded under the Home and Community Care Program.

The Program, operating within a case management framework, utilises a range of approaches to initially engage with people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness, in order to provide ease of access and break down any barriers. The small team conducts twice weekly outreaches to the Botanic Gardens and other inner city areas that are frequented by rough sleepers.

Each week there is a ‘drop in’ service where people can access the Centre to link with external providers Centrelink Community Team, Spritus Nursing, Homeless Health Outreach Team (Mental Health) as well as utilising facilities i.e. laundry, showers and sharing a home cooked meal. A recent evaluation of the ‘drop in’ service found that individuals appreciated the environment at drop in for its informality, sense of safety, welcome and hospitality.

A key to engaging with people is to ensure that what they are comfortable with in relation to their personal circumstances. Most people found out about ‘drop in’ through friends on the street and treated the environment respectfully as a ‘safe haven’ from the stresses of their day to day lives. For many users the service provides a place not just a space for them to access supports and resources that are important to them.

‘If it wasn’t for this place, I wouldn’t be where I am.’

Footprints believe that individualised case management support is pivotal in overcoming the diverse range of challenges faced by this vulnerable target group.

A key to engaging with people is to ensure a person centred approach enabling the staff to offer responsive and meaningful support, when it is needed.

While there are constant challenges and setbacks, we are committed to walk beside our client group and take positive steps forward every day.

Tom: A Case Study

Tom is a 60 year old man with complex needs with an acquired brain injury, schizophrenia (under ITO Order), an obsessive compulsive disorder, an inability to manage finances and with a long history of homelessness. He was referred to the Homeless Outreach Program for assistance to obtain and sustain suitable housing. Following months of building a trusting relationship he was open to receiving more intensive and specialised case management support and agreed to the appointment of a designated case manager to identify and subsequently address his ongoing and unmet needs.

Through the case management process Tom was initially supported to obtain a lease in a public housing unit. Although housed in long term accommodation Tom’s tenancy is constantly at risk due to extreme hoarding behaviours, poor personal hygiene and an inability to maintain his unit to an acceptable standard. In order to support Tom the case manager coordinated with other services on a weekly basis, including:

- Nursing services to monitor physical health and wound care;
- Mental Health Services for fortnightly psychiatric reviews;
- HACC Community Options for domestic assistance to retain tenure and the ongoing coordination of services;
- Brisbane Housing Company for tenancy management, and
- Regularly with the Public Trustee and General Practitioner.

On a twice weekly basis the case manager also acts as a point of consistency and stability for Tom, providing informal advice and counselling, assisting with day to day issues encouraging his belief in his ability to cope with the demands of mainstream society and focusing on his strengths and goals and working towards achieving an optimum level of functional independence. Without the receipt of this ongoing case management and support from the Homeless Health Outreach team Tom would very quickly spiral back into homelessness and his health, safety and overall wellbeing would be severely compromised.

He is now able to live independently in the community and have choice in how he lives his life and he is very comfortable in sourcing additional support via his case manager or other Program staff, should he require it.

The most important factor and one that other services and health providers also acknowledge, is that there is a consistent person to act as point of contact which enables any issues that may be detrimental to his wellbeing to be addressed quickly and any interventions implemented in a timely manner.
Housed but not Forgotten

By Natasha Livings,
Service Coordinator,
Spiritus Anglican Women’s Hostel

Someone asked me recently “What are the major issues for homeless women accessing Anglican Women’s Hostel (AWH)?”

For the first time in almost 10 years in the homelessness field, I had nothing to say. I was quite literally silent. What has happened, I thought, to render me silent on the major issues for homeless women? I thought… Housing, has happened, and continues to happen for the women of Anglican Women’s Hostel, almost every day.

Once upon a time, the dedicated case managers and support workers of the crisis accommodation service in inner-city Brisbane would sigh despondently and bow their heads as their daily attempts to advocate and assist women to navigate the arduous processes and systems of housing in Queensland would fail. But today, the receipt of cards, blocks of Hazelnut chocolate and flowers to say thanks on moving day, are testament not only to the hard work of AWH staff, but to the significant changes that have occurred as a result of the One Social Housing System.

The One Social Housing System is working for the women of Anglican Women’s Hostel. The high level of discomfort and confusion which resulted from the development of the system has finally dissipated. The service, which accommodates 14 women for a period of up to three months, has observed a major shift in the Queensland housing system.

Once upon a time, we would nervously approach the end of the three months for many women, having tried, and tried again to source public or community housing for the women who often experience violence, mental illness, disability, poverty, or addiction in addition to their housing crisis.

Through a case management model, case managers develop a plan for addressing the housing and other support needs of the women and identify the barriers to maintaining long-term housing. Now, in some cases, we are witnessing housing offers, before we are even able to develop a case plan.

Anglican Women’s Hostel is fortunate enough to also offer the Single Women’s Integrated Support and Housing program, affectionately known as ‘SWISH’, where eight CAP funded one or two bedroom units, and one BCC property are rented to women who have transitioned from the hostel, and into their own tenancy until a permanent housing offer is made by the likes of Housing and Homelessness Services, BRIC or Four Walls. Of late, we have moved women into these properties, only to move them back out and into their own permanent public or community housing property within a few short weeks.

AWH staff continue to pinch themselves every day. The question remains though, will this last? The significant investment and development of housing stock, particularly in inner-city Brisbane is impressive. The traditional service level responses to homelessness have moved to a highly focussed, dedicated, and coordinated service system that is committed to ‘ending homelessness’.

For the first time, despite the continuation of high demand for crisis accommodation, and the daily calls from women asking: ‘Do you have a bed?’, ‘No vacancies today, have you tried Pindari?’, our focus has shifted beyond crisis, to permanent housing.

This is not to say that the crisis response is redundant. How do we support women to break the cycle of homelessness, if there is literally no time to pause and reflect on the unique experience of homelessness for women? That is to truly understand the precursors of their homelessness and to ensure that women are linked with the support they need to maintain their housing into the future.

Specialist crisis services are an essential part of the jigsaw puzzle. Whilst we now have clearer and easier pathways out of crisis, interventions must continue to be available at this level in order for sustainable housing to occur.

So if things continue to move as rapidly as they are currently, what must be done? We must firstly cross our fingers and pray that the honeymoon never ends and housing offers continue to pour in, and that the renewed enthusiasm and reinvigoration within the service system does not waiver.

Finally, we must ensure that women are followed on their ‘road home’, that support to maintain their tenancy, and break the cycle of their homelessness occurs. We must ensure that women are housed, but not forgotten.

* Natasha Livings is the Service Coordinator of Spiritus Anglican Women’s Hostel providing crisis and medium-term community housing and support to single women, 18+, unaccompanied by a child or partner.

Anglican Women’s Hostel has been operating since 1976 and is located in inner-city Brisbane.
The face of homelessness in Australia is changing. The latest Census in 2006 shows that homelessness is now a phenomena that crosses all gender, age, cultural and educational backgrounds (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

In 2006, it was conservatively estimated that 105,000 people met the criteria of homelessness each night across Australia. Queensland has the highest number of people sleeping rough out of all the States. In a Gold Coast City Council sanctioned survey that occurred in April 2006, there was found to be on average 2,183 people living rough each night with 8–10 families living in cars.

Looking closer at the homeless population, we find that 31% seeking emergency accommodation or relief admitted to having a mental illness, substance issue or both (Carney, 2007). Most services within the homelessness sector would say that those figures are conservative. In fact, Wilson in 2007 stated that “the evidence would suggest that between 30–80% of the homeless community have a mental disorder.”

One of the issues that have been highlighted is that people who have a mental illness have a history of difficulty accessing appropriate housing and support services that enable them to maintain their accommodation. Curmi (2007) believes this is due to a lack of partnership between mental health and housing services leading to a failure to work together, share resources and utilise knowledge, skills and competencies to more effectively meet the needs of this population. Unfortunately, people experiencing homelessness have to find their way through a myriad of services and often need to tell their stories over and over again.

So what is an effective partnership and how can this occur? In this article, we will consider what makes an effective partnership and then outline a partnership that is working on the Gold Coast, showing how it has had improved outcomes for people with a mental illness who find themselves homeless.

Partnerships

Partnership means that agencies involved in providing services to people with a particular need, work together to support people seeking services. Partnerships should extend across non-government and all level of government with the focus being on the person for whom the services are being provided, not on bureaucratic systems being satisfied.

That is not to say the systems and processes are not important. They are. But they should lie behind the partnerships, invisible to the consumer, aiding the system to provide the best service. They should not be the barrier to good service provision that they often are.

One way for this to happen is for services that form the partnerships to have an attitude of there being “no wrong door”. By collaborating together, services within the sector will be able to assist those seeking services to find those services. Multiple entry points into the sector will mean that people will have their needs assessed and receive appropriate assistance. Their path through the sector should be smooth and guided.

For this to happen, the partnership agreements between services need to agree to the holistic assessment and to joint planning co-ordination and case management. There needs to be shared information among services about the person seeking services.

When services work more collaboratively together and with the client, they are better able to problem solve, provide holistic services and achieve better outcomes.

Clients are provided with the most accurate information and receive assistance and direction to assist them with their goals, benefiting from a smooth transition between
Outcomes of Partnerships

Perhaps the best way to show you what can be achieved through partnerships is to look at someone’s journey through the Homeless sector on the Gold Coast.

Mike had been living rough on Gold Coast streets for over 25 years. He has a diagnosis of schizophrenia and has a history of alcohol abuse. He had connected with one agency, St John’s, which provides a meal service five days a week in the Surfers Paradise area. He owned a bike and carried a small bag that carried all his possessions. He was not keen to link with any other agency; however, over time he began talking with the Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT) workers who attended at St John’s.

As he became more comfortable with staff, he shared that he thought he was on the housing list but hadn’t heard from them for years. After a few weeks of discussing his housing situation with the team members, he finally agreed to accompany a staff member to the Department of Housing (as it was known then).

One of the issues for Mike was that though he had been on the streets for a long time, he always felt scared and was hyper-vigilant at night. This meant he did not sleep well. This in turn impacted upon his health and his mental health. He found it difficult to maintain any sort of contact with mental health services and was too afraid to know that HHOT could provide the services to him on the street.

The staff member at the Department of Housing indicated he wasn’t on the list and so he was duly placed on the list. He was prioritised as special needs. With this success, Mike then gave HHOT written consent to speak with a number of agencies on his behalf.

At this point, HHOT called a case conference and invited Department of Housing, Gold Coast Housing Company, Blair Athol, HOST, Oz Care Homeless Health Outreach Support Team, and St John’s. The aim of the meeting was to see if a response to Mike’s needs could be co-ordinated. After much discussion, Gold Coast Housing Company was able to offer Mike a unit while Department of Housing searched for the “right” unit. Blair Athol and Host were able to provide assistance with locating some furniture and household items. Ozcare were happy to be involved in providing some services to make sure he was able to access the GP for physical health issues and St John’s would continue to provide meals as necessary and assist with such things as paying for medications. HHOT was to co-ordinate all services, communicate any changes in Mike’s needs and of course focus on his mental health.

The early days of Mike living in the unit were interesting. He only visited the unit for the first three days, preferring to live on the street until he made sure it was safe. Over the first few months, the occasional night would still be spent on the street, particularly when he was feeling paranoid about his neighbours.

However, with assistance from all the agencies he began to settle in and learn independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking, managing his medications etc. He reconnected with his family with whom he had lost contact and began to visit his aging parents and siblings.

He was then referred to Personal Helpers and Mentors Service (PhaMS) who worked with him on his living skills and started to involve him in Federation Clubhouse. He was so excited when he actually re-enrolled on the electoral role and voted in the 2007 Federal election.

He has now been successfully housed for over 3 years. PhaMS continue to be involved as are HHOT. He is in his Housing and Homelessness Services’ unit. He is a model tenant and is very house proud. He still has moments of difficulties but works with the different agencies to solve these. The agencies come and go as necessary providing what assistance he needs at the time, enabling him to live a life that gives him pleasure. As he so eloquently says, “Life is good now.”

Conclusion

Partnership between all agencies, both government and non-government, is essential if people who have complex needs and are experiencing homelessness are to ever be able to break the cycle of homelessness.

Partnerships need to provide the backdrop for flexible service delivery that crosses traditional boundaries and sees barriers as obstacles to be overcome together, not insurmountable brick walls.

When agencies can foster the spirit of partnership and collaboration, then a win-win situation can be achieved for all. But even better yet, the outcome for the most important person in the picture, the client, can be all encompassing life success story.

Partnerships — are they worth it? Mike says, “Yes!”

References

Real Outcomes vs Capacity Reporting: Changing Service Approach at the Ozcare Homeless Men’s Hostel, Bundaberg

By Ozcare Queensland

In a world that is constantly changing, it is to the advantage of those involved with services for the homeless, to learn how to adapt and to do things differently and hopefully better: all the while developing even greater skills for managing change.

This response to change is inspired by the release of the Federal Government’s 2008 Homelessness Green Paper – Which way home?: A new approach to homelessness, as well as embracing the message contained within Blanchard’s (1998)’ Who Moved My Cheese’.

In mid 2008, Ozcare began introducing a new model of service for its Homeless Men’s Hostels under the banner ‘From Dependency to Independence’. The Men’s Hostel at Bundaberg, a 32 bed facility, has ‘seen the writing on the wall’ and has literally been ‘moving with the cheese’ ever since.

The service identified that to improve its service outcomes for clients, it needed to change what it was doing and re-evaluate its place in the care continuum of those that are homeless, or at risk of being so.

Bundaberg Hostel increasingly developed strong case-management interventions, close community networks with related service providers and alternative accommodation options. In addition, a shift was introduced, away from the traditional thinking about homeless men, and the style of service that they had historically experienced, where clients had been sitting at the ‘Cheese Station’, waiting for the next meal and a warm bed.

Bundaberg Hostel moved to actively encourage its clients to spend as little time as possible just sitting around passing time. Rather, resident clients are assigned a primary case-worker on admission and a support plan is developed with them. Clients are actively encouraged to seek alternative and sustainable accommodation within the community, and to re-engage in the workforce, or undertake learning options as soon as possible.

Measuring Outcomes

Through the development of in-house early intervention and support services, flexibility in the length of stay, and integrated stakeholder community agency partnerships, there has been a shift towards a more holistic service delivery which adequately engages the clients. This enhanced personalised engagement results in a higher level of positive outcomes for clients, and their attainment of stable, long-term, independent accommodation within the community.

Through the implementation of these successful initiatives, there has been an appreciable decline in the level of capacity utilisation of the service. This reduction has drawn criticism, as the reduction in utilisation is interpreted as a decline in service delivery.

However, there is a range of possible reasons that may explain this outcome, not the least of which could be that the client group is not receptive to the increased structure that case-management imposes.

Indeed, a detailed analysis of the overall outcomes for clients identifies that through its initiatives, the hostel is meeting the objectives of The Road Home – Homelessness White Paper (2008),2 with clear and measurable positive outcomes for the clients.

This is reflected in a three-year tracking of outcomes from the Hostel SMART tool with the results set out in the table below.

The Australian Government Homelessness White Paper The Road Home identified that one of the ways in which homelessness can be prevented, is by tackling the structural drivers of homelessness. However, the current method of evaluating the performance of hostels services is based on the percentage of capacity utilisation. This is paradoxical in that it drives a different set of outcomes that are more consistent with maintenance of the historical status quo. Although much has been said about the need for a move to output-based funding, little has eventuated to date.

Adapting for the Future

The vision proposed in the White Paper lends itself to an outcomes-based funding solution, with: specialist homelessness services being able to provide wrap-around services to clients; differentiated levels of support to people who are homeless depending on their needs; and clients being able to move through specialist homelessness services into longer-term stable accommodation as fast or as slowly as their individual circumstances dictate.

The homeless services sector recognises that knowledge of and the approaches to address homelessness are changing, and service delivery needs to change accordingly. This includes adapting to a future focused revolving around achieving real outcomes for clients.

Footnotes

3. Ozcare Men’s Hostel SAAP Reporting Tool Report – SMART

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<th>2008</th>
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<th>2010</th>
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<td>“After-support independent living” rate</td>
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<td>61.2%</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<td>“Return to streets or no information” rate</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>“Workforces engagement” rate</td>
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</table>
The Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT): Inner North Brisbane Mental Health Service

By Dianne Tarrant, Acting HHOT Team Manager, INBMHS Metro North Mental Health Service

The Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT) was established at Inner North Brisbane’s Mental Health Service (INBMHS) in 2006. It was set up to cover the holistic healthcare needs of people with predominantly, primary or secondary homelessness in inner city Brisbane.

HHOT was established as one of the Queensland Health Homeless initiatives managed by the Mental Health Directorate, Queensland Health. However, the team and services are provided by the Health Service District. INBMHS HHOT provides this service across two health service districts; Metro North and Metro South Health Service Districts.

The Role of HHOT

HHOT provides a holistic approach to health care for the homeless and works with other departments and non-government organisations to ensure there is an appropriate response to the health needs of homeless individuals residing in and around public spaces. This includes the provision of appropriate health care through collaboration with existing service providers. (Queensland Health, 2008)

People who are homeless and who require any services from HHOT will be assessed for their suitability for treatment options and need to consent to any referrals made on their behalf. Some research suggests that 30–75% of people experiencing homelessness experience a mental illness (Teeson, Hodder and Buhrich, 2004). In some cases their mental illness contributes to homeless numbers while for some, a mental illness is a consequence of homelessness. For this reason demand on the HHOT service remains high.

At any one time HHOT will have around 100 open clients and another 20 waiting on assessment and around 50 referrals are processed a month. Many people seen by HHOT will not be directly assisted by the service; rather service brokerage will be used to link them with appropriate services. These services will assist with the situational crisis these people experience, assist them regain their personal resilience and help them manage the situation that has led to their homelessness and thus move forward.

Service Delivery Model

The service is responsive to the needs of the client group by ensuring a strong client focus that is supportive, non judgemental, accessible and culturally sensitive. It provides a recovery approach to care, recognising that clients have the greatest knowledge and expertise regarding their needs and service requirements. It also provides a comprehensive assessment and works with the client to develop an agreed individual service plan (Queensland Health 2006).

The Inner North Brisbane Mental Health service (INBMHS) has chosen to use a strengths based recovery philosophy of care and around 50% of clients in the HHOT service choose strengths assessments and goals plans to identify and work towards achieving agreed goals in collaboration with HHOT clinicians as opposed to clients who do not choose to be actively involved with the care planning process.

Assertive Outreach

Assertive Outreach is essential to reaching and engaging people who are homeless and is proven to produce a 37% greater reduction in homelessness and 26% greater reduction in psychiatric symptoms. (Coldwell and Bender 2007). It allows for timely and responsive access to services to people who do not readily use clinic-based services but who are nevertheless in need of health intervention and/or assistance. Assertive outreach in this instance brings the service to the people in their community setting by taking the outreach clinics to the environments used by the clients.

The approach to service delivery is holistic and may include: helping with medications, housing, finances and everyday problems in living. The outreach service may occur on the streets or it may be provided at places where homeless people are known to congregate or visit. These places may include shelters, food vans, parks or other homeless agencies. This approach to service delivery increases the ability of the team to successfully engage homeless people and encourage their participation in treatment.

Target Group

- Individuals who are homeless who have health concerns and who are not linked into existing services.
- Other health, homeless, community, government and non-government agencies and service providers.
- No limits or exclusions based on age, disability or diagnosis. However clients who are currently case managed by the District Mental Health Service are excluded.

Referral criteria:

- All ages
- Mental Health or substance use disorder
- Must reside in 5 kms of CBD
- Not case managed by another district mental health service
- Must fit criteria for primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness

The INBMHS HHOT team currently provides twenty-seven outreach clinics a week across fifteen Non-Government Organisation (NGO) venues and attends various food vans across the city centre to be available to meet the needs of this homeless population. Referrals are taken from hospital services, local NGOs, General Practitioners, and other services around the state and by self referral.

The INBMHS HHOT team also includes the Indigenous Homeless and Community Outreach Team clinicians provided through Metro North and South Health Service District Drug and Alcohol services and it is consequently able to work with people whose primary concern is alcohol and drug misuse and the impact this has on the mental health and social circumstances of this population when in situational crisis. Homelessness and mental illness have a high correlation and there is also a high relation for this population with substance use issues (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008).

The INBMHS service is aligned with the state-wide guidelines for homeless services incorporating assertive outreach, case management and collaborative response at the core of its service delivery model. However, it must be emphasised that HHOT does not provide accommodation but links directly with housing initiatives though its NGO partners. HHOT will assist clients in linking with local emergency accommodation and housing providers but does not arrange accommodation as a core function of service (Queensland Health, 2006).

HHOT has established Memorandum’s of Understanding with most local NGOs in the area to facilitate information sharing and
collaboration to achieve effective outcomes for our shared clients. (Queensland Health 2008) Additionally HHOT clinicians provide education for NGO staff as required and are able to assist our NGO partners in managing the care needs of clients with a mental illness.

A secondary benefit of the collaborative model of care has been the wealth of knowledge that is quickly accessed by HHOT clinicians to determine what is available in the local community that can be responsive to clients’ needs.

HHOT does not provide a timeframe for service exit. However, referral onto longer term stable treatment services does happen when the client has achieved and maintained stable housing for a reasonable time period. Exit services include return to General Practitioner care and referral to a geographically based mental health continuing care team if this is required (Queensland Health, 2008).

HHOT has been a highly effective initiative effecting a change in service delivery to homeless people and improving inter-sectoral collaboration (Seelig, Thompson, Foster, Phillips and Ramsden, 2008).

**References**


**Outcomes: Some Case Studies**

Jane, 43, was assessed by HHOT after contact by staff at a local bus station advising of concern for Jane who had been sitting at a bus stop in the city for days, apparently distressed talking to herself — on assessment grossly psychotic, apparently itinerant, and unable to provide adequate care for herself. Following a short hospitalisation Jane was reunited with her family in Northern Queensland eventually returning to her fulltime government job.

Aaron, 52, was picked up at an outreach clinic at a crisis accommodation shelter in the city. It was discovered during triaging the referral that Aaron had been diagnosed with invasive melanoma several months earlier but due to itinerancy he had not had follow up cancer treatment. Aaron was assessed at Oncology and given a short survival timeframe as his cancer was now seriously advanced. In the few weeks left in Aaron’s life his family was able to engage with him, having been unable to contact him for several years before his cancer diagnosis. This was a comfort to Aaron in his passing.

Rodney, 57, was referred by Prison Mental Health service on release from custody. Rodney had been incarcerated for a number of years, having been found guilty of sexual offences against a minor. He required treatment for his long standing depression and dependant personality traits, alongside support from NGO’s to successfully re-integrate in society to lower potential re-offending and ensure adequate support/oversight was in place to protect children in the future. Rodney is now living in long term stable accommodation, working part-time and linked in with an NGO support person to engage in appropriate social activities.
Collaboration: The Key to Successful Client Outcomes

By Ozcare Queensland

The Gold Coast Family Accommodation Program

The Ozcare Gold Coast Family Accommodation Support Service understands that no agency can do it all and that the process of sharing of skills and knowledge with other services in the best interests of clients improves outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. Cross agency collaboration also assists services, through their staff, to enhance their own skills and knowledge in working with some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

The service began its journey in 1989 by providing emergency shelter, and in more recent years has been built upon the value and principles of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. The service now supports clients in eleven properties located across the Gold Coast region in Queensland.

The service has developed into a comprehensive program of support that utilises cross agency collaboration to provide its clients with a continuum of care that maximises the range of supports available within the region.

The service provides: three Crisis Houses, offering up to 12–13 weeks intensive support; eight Transitional Houses, offering 6–12 months medium to low level support; and Post-Discharge Follow Up Support (on a referral basis) to clients of other agencies, offering 12–13 weeks low level support assisting families to sustain and maintain their accommodation.

There has been significant learning and practice development within the service, and with the accumulation of practice experience and service wisdom across the sector, collaborative provision of support to families experiencing homelessness has improved significantly. The changes...
and growth have also coincided with reforms currently under way within The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (the ‘White Paper’), released on 21 December 2008.

In 2009, the former Department of Housing amalgamated with the existing Department of Communities. The former Department’s core policy functions are now managed by the Department of Communities’ Housing and Homelessness Services program area. Despite the transfer of responsibility for homelessness policy to the Department of Communities Housing and Homelessness Services, property management (including maintenance, upgrades and leases) of all properties used for crisis homelessness services has remained within a separate departmental division. What do these new arrangements mean for clients?

**Integrated Strengths-based Approach**

At a strategic level, as part of a broader response to the new national agenda, the formerly separate Department of Communities and Department of Housing are now working towards more integrated services for people experiencing homelessness, and to improve client pathways from crisis to longer-term sustainable housing. These changes will have positive outcomes for people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

At a service level, there has been a continuing move towards the implementation of a strengths-based framework that underpins the service’s work with clients. Berg (1994) points to viewing clients as individuals with resources and strengths rather than dwelling on difficulties and failures.

A strengths-based perspective provides a space for clients to experience themselves and their world differently. Drawing from their own experiences, and being provided with support, education, and advocacy, enables families to enhance or recover their capacity to transition from a state of crisis, to securing and maintaining independent, stable, secure accommodation.

Incumbent in a strengths-based approach is a responsibility to recognise that the family is the authority of their own situation and that the service should attempt to assist the family in positioning themselves, and not to become reliant on professional expertise.

Perhaps the most significant understanding for workers in this sector is the importance of working within a strengths-based approach. Families are their own greatest source of positive change and as Guy (2010) offered, that success in achieving goals comes about: 40% through a family’s own strengths, supports, and beliefs; 30% through supportive relationships that offer empathy understanding, warmth, care, respect and genuineness; 15% through a family’s belief in hope and their change orientation; and finally 15% through professional techniques applied by staff of a Service to provide consistent structure and focus.

It is through optimistic goal setting that focuses on what things have gone right, or identifying problem-solving approaches that have worked for them in the past, that clients are led to the realisation that their present crisis is likely to have more than one solution. Staff work with clients to create a collaborative, not a directive relationship, using transparency and language which focus on strengths, change, action and wants, and having conversations of ‘difference to produce difference’.

**Network for Collaboration**

Effectively supporting client families also requires an acceptance that services cannot work in isolation. Many success stories credited to the service have been achieved through collaboration. Ozcare is a large and multi-faceted organisation that has substantial capacity for internal referral of client families for a range of supports.

However, even with this readily available resource, the service remains constantly mindful of the suite of services also available for clients within the Gold Coast Community.

The Gold Coast Homeless Network (Network) has provided a forum to raise issues, provide support and to both build upon, and develop collaboration between services.

Network objectives are: to explore issues and trends in relation to homelessness; to identify and develop a co-ordinated range of responses to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; to create and promote more positive community responses to people who are homeless or ‘at risk’; to foster provision of quality services for people who are homeless or ‘at risk’ among members; recognition as a planning and advisory group to feed into government knowledge of a wide variety of relevant legislation.

The ability to call on the resources of a collaborative network continues to be of immense benefit to many workers across a wide range of Services, of which the Gold Coast Homeless Network has been particularly evident in working with families, through improved referral pathways both in and out of other services, as well as providing a continuum of care that would not have been possible without the Network. Continuing to build upon its inter-agency success, the Network is currently establishing process and protocols to provide enhanced wrap-around support for individuals and families with complex needs requiring high levels of support.

**Collaboration in Practice**

A case study that demonstrates the positive power of collaboration relates to a family with eight children. During their stay, there was a serious episode whereby the father assaulted one of the children resulting in charges being laid, and the Child Safety Agency became involved. The mother and the children went into a shelter until they could be relocated into temporary accommodation in another Ozcare Crisis House.

The service, working with the family and in collaboration with Network partners, developed an extensive safety plan. The service plan included advocacy and follow-up support, delivered in collaboration with two Child Safety Officers.

The service was able to advocate with Child Safety for the woman’s case to be transferred to another Child Safety Service Centre, with ongoing wrap-around support continuing to be provided to the family by Ozcare.

The wrap-around support provided by the service included linking the family in with other community support services, which provided, for example, schooling and recreational activities for the children, parenting support for the mother, and child care. The family has now settled into an alternative social housing property and is linked into community and social supports in the area. The wrap-around support able to be provided to the mother, through a collaborative Network approach to her case management, assisted her to make safe choices and prevented the family from fragmentation, which would have occurred through the separation of a mother and her children.

**Conclusion**

This case study demonstrates the stark reality that it is not just adults but also the children of parents who have been experiencing homelessness, that need high levels of support. Literature and research highlight the challenges that housing Support Workers face in mediating between maintenance of accommodation, education, support and all other needs. Workers require high levels of inter-personal skills and knowledge of a wide variety of relevant legislation.

The ability to call on the resources of a collaborative network continues to be of immense benefit to many workers across a wide range of Services, of which the Gold Coast Homeless Network has been particularly evident in working with families, through improved referral pathways both in and out of other services, as well as providing a continuum of care that would not have been possible without the Network. Continuing to build upon its inter-agency success, the Network is currently establishing process and protocols to provide enhanced wrap-around support for individuals and families with complex needs requiring high levels of support.

**References**


The RecLink “Transformers” Choir

By Genevieve Dingle, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland, Ben Pennings, Community Development Co-ordinator, RecLink Brisbane, Chris Brander, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland and Jolanda Jetten, School of Psychology, The University of Queensland and The University of Exeter, England

The Importance of Social Groups

The link between social connectedness and physical and mental health has been well established (Jetten, Haslam, Haslam, and Branscombe, 2009). For example, Putnam (2000) summarises the existing evidence as: “the more integrated we are in our community, the less likely we are to experience colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression and premature death of all sorts” (p. 326). This implies that those who are well-connected experience real health benefits, but also that those who are already vulnerable and therefore are unable to maintain connectedness with their society are at a double disadvantage and risk. For example, Putnam (2000) summarises the existing evidence as: “the more integrated we are in our community, the less likely we are to experience colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression and premature death of all sorts” (p. 326). This implies that those who are well-connected experience real health benefits, but also that those who are already vulnerable and therefore are unable to maintain connectedness with their society are at a double disadvantage and risk. For example, one would expect that those who experience mental illness or are homeless (or both), are not only vulnerable because of the risks associated with these conditions, their health may be further compromised because they feel excluded and isolated from their local community (SANE Australia, 2010).

Despite this, research on the relationship between social networks and health of homeless individuals indicates that this relationship is complex. For example, it is not correct to assume that all homeless people are socially isolated (Eyrich, Pollio, and North, 2003), nor is it correct to assume that larger social networks are necessarily better for mental health (Irwin, LaGory, Ritchey, and Fitzpatrick, 2008). Instead, when predicting well-being and health, the nature of the social connections appears to be important. For example, social connections based on meeting survival needs or addiction needs may be less health enhancing for the individual than connections based on abilities and recreational interests.

RecLink is a charitable organisation with 17 networks throughout urban, regional and remote Australia that provides recreational (sporting, arts, and cultural) activities and referral links for people experiencing disadvantage. One activity conducted by the Brisbane RecLink Network is a choir “The Transformers”, and this article reports on research conducted with the choir over its inaugural year.

Choirs and Health

There is growing evidence that choir singing has a positive effect on mood and health. For example, a study of 84 members of a university college choir in England identified six dimensions of benefits associated with singing: benefits for well being and relaxation, breathing and posture, social benefits, spiritual benefits, emotional benefits, and benefits for heart and immune system (Cliff and Hancox, 2001). Bailey and Davidson (Bailey and Davidson, 2002, 2003, 2005) conducted a series of studies exploring the effects of group singing among homeless and marginalised people as well as among a group of middle class people. The positive effects of group singing and performance in these samples were found on four outcomes: clinical type benefits (energy, relaxation, singer’s high), group process (social support, camaraderie, normalcy), choir/audience reciprocity (empowerment, contribution, pride), and cognitive stimulation (concentration, ordered thought process). Australian researchers (Grocke, Bloch, and Castle, 2009) investigated the effect of group music therapy on quality of life and social anxiety among 29 people with chronic mental illness.

Ten one-hour weekly sessions were conducted with activities such as singing, song writing and improvisation and a recording session at the end. Significant improvement was found on 5 items of a quality of life scale, including increased general quality of life, health, and perceived support from friends.

It appears that choirs provide both the benefit of group membership and the specific health benefits of music and singing. The aim of the Transformers study was to evaluate the impact of joining a choir on the mental health and social connectedness in a group of disadvantaged adults in inner city Brisbane.
The Transformers Choir

During the year, membership of the choir fluctuated around 40 to 45 participants, with 34 choir members consenting to provide information for the study.

Sample background information is presented in Table 1. Table 1 shows that most choir members experienced chronic mental health problems, and a smaller but still sizeable percentage reported physical or intellectual disabilities. Around 20% were referred from homeless services although it is estimated that up to 60% of the choir members had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Only one participant reported being in treatment for an alcohol problem, however, choir organisers were aware that substance misuse was affecting the choir attendance of around 10% of members. Sixty-one percent reported they were taking medication for a mental health problem.

Measures and Interview

Due to varying capacities among the choir members, both questionnaire and interview data were collected at three time points: at the inception of the choir, after 6 months (which was after the choir’s first public performances), and after 12 months.

Of the 34 who consented to participate at the start, 11 completed all three questionnaires and 6 completed all three interviews, while the others provided data at one or two time points. We were particularly interested in negative mood symptoms — as measured by the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond and Lovibond, 1995) and experiential avoidance — defined as attempts to avoid unwanted internal experiences such as emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations and taking action to avoid such experiences through social avoidance, substance abuse, self harm or other problematic behaviours — as measured by the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire (AAQ) (Hayes et al., 2004).

Social connectedness within the choir was measured by a diagram measure of Group Identity Fusion (Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, and Huici, 2009) and connectedness with the local community was measured by a 4-item Social Identity scale (Doosje, Spears, and Ellemers, 2002). Perceptions of choir members’ mental health, general wellbeing and social connectedness in the year of the choir compared with the year prior to joining the choir were obtained from the subset of 11 participants who had completed questionnaires at all three time points. The interviewers joined the choir and attended rehearsals in order to build rapport with the choir members. Although the qualitative analysis of the interviews supported the survey measures, in the interests of brevity we will focus mainly on the survey measures here.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Characteristics of the Transformers Choir sample</th>
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<td><strong>Age range:</strong> 31–74 years</td>
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<td><strong>Gender:</strong> 67% female, 33% male</td>
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<td><strong>Relationship status:</strong> Single 38%, In a relationship 18%, Divorced / Separated 24%, Widowed 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education (highest level):</strong> Primary school 3%, Junior high school 9%, Senior high school 26%, Certificate/diploma 18%, Tertiary education 21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status:</strong> Paid employment only 3%, Paid and social security 12%, Social security only 50%, Other 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health status:</strong> Mental health problems 89%, Physical disability 35%, Intellectual disability 12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

Mood symptoms fluctuated over the course of the year as shown in Figure 1. Average scores on depression and stress were in the mild range while anxiety was in the moderate range at the start of the year. All negative mood indicators increased slightly at the six-month point (around the first performance), and then decreased back to mild levels at the 12 month point.

Repeated measures ANOVAs on each of the three mood subscale scores revealed that the changes over time were non-significant.

![Figure 1. Scores on the Depression (blue) Anxiety (red) and Stress (green) Scales at the beginning, six months and 12 months of choir membership in 34 disadvantaged adults.](#)

Experiential avoidance (measured by the AAQ) was in the non-clinical range at the start of the study (M = 38.8, SD = 8.351) and reduced slightly by 12 months (M = 37.4, SD = 10.596). A paired samples t-test found no significant difference between the scores on the AAQ between the start of the year and 12 months later: t(10) = 1.176, NS. Experiential avoidance was strongly related to mood symptoms at the start of the choir: Depression: r = .839, p < .001; Anxiety: r = .425, p = .03; and Stress: r = .664, p < .001. This relationship remained strong at 12 months: Depression: r = .887, p < .001; Anxiety: r = .799, p = .006; and Stress: r = .941, p < .001. In other words, the choir members with the most experiential avoidance were likely to be more distressed but were attending the choir despite this inner turmoil.

Group Identity Fusion was not measured at the start of the choir, as members had not had time to get to know one another yet. At six months, significant negative correlations were found between Group Identity Fusion scores and mood symptoms: Depression: r = .701, p = .004; Anxiety: r = .615, p = .011, and Stress: r = .684, p = .007; indicating that the individuals who felt more connected with the choir experienced lower levels of mood symptoms. Group Identity Fusion scores at six months were also significantly correlated with measures of connectedness with the local community, including “I feel strong ties with the local community” (r = .544, p = .029) and correlations approaching significance for “I see myself as a member of the local community” (r = .487, p = .056) and “I identify with other members of the community” (r = .484, p = .057).

A majority of choir members interviewed at 12 months reported that their social contact with other choir members had extended beyond the choir rehearsals and included phone calls, invitations to other social events, and offers of transport and other forms of social support. Two members of the choir became engaged and another couple were married during the year.

Choir members described their experience of the choir as beneficial to their mood and wellbeing, and some reported functional improvements such as building the confidence to start volunteer work or to apply for paid work. Of the subset who were asked to compare their year in the choir with the year prior to joining the choir, most reported that their mental health was “better” (73%) or “the same” (27%).

Most also reported that their general wellbeing during the choir year was “better” (91%) than the year before they joined. And finally, a majority perceived their social connectedness was “better” (73%) than the year before they joined the choir.

Conclusion

The study provides some initial evidence for the beneficial effects of singing together. Even though singing in the choir was associated with new stressors relating to performance anxiety (from 6 months onwards), it appeared that those who were most committed to the group were experiencing less stress in the second half of the year. In other words, the connectedness to the group buffered performance anxiety and this allowed members to deal more effectively with current and new types of stressors.

Having said that, it is probably the case that the real value of the choir relates to the fact that it facilitated the development of new relationships and a broad social network. This allowed for positive outcomes in a broader domain of life. It thus appears that it may not be so much the singing that has beneficial effects, it is singing together that transforms people’s lives because it enhances social connectedness.

A full list of the References used in this article can be found on www.chp.org.au/parity
Chapter 4: Housing and Homelessness, Responses and Issues in Queensland

Benefit Recipients Reliant on Shared Accommodation

By Joanne Copp, Executive Officer, Research and Advocacy, Spiritus

In this paper we look briefly at the appropriateness of reliance on shared accommodation as a means of affordable accommodation supply.

The Anglican Community Services Commission in the Brisbane Diocese recently undertook a South East Queensland snapshot of the level of affordable and appropriate housing for those reliant on government benefits. Affordability was defined as rental costs up to 30% of the particular benefit plus the level of Commonwealth Rent Assistance to which the person would be entitled. This 30% benchmark is commonly used as an indicator of “housing stress” among low income households.

Properties were considered appropriate according to whether there were sufficient bedrooms for the family type and size and, for the purposes of this snapshot, it was assumed that shared accommodation was only suitable for a single person.

Based on all rentals advertised both in print and online, 16% of rental properties were found to be both affordable and appropriate for benefit recipients. What surprised us most was that of these rentals, 82% were shared accommodation. This result raised more questions than it answered.

To some extent, the degree to which people are reliant on shared accommodation flies beneath the radar, as analyses of Queensland housing focus on dwellings types of flat/unit, house and townhouse by the number of bedrooms. This article looks at the pros and cons of shared accommodation within Brisbane. It identifies two major issues.

Firstly it considers the importance of “removing some of the triggers of homelessness”, where inadequate rights for those in shared accommodation are examples of such triggers.

The protection afforded to such renters under common law and the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 is for the most part considered to be inadequate.

Secondly, it is important to recognise that, while tenancy laws establish minimum standards for some tenancies, if we are to bring about greater levels of security for renters, as a base for them to form constructive relationships, grow families and seek employment and community engagement, as a society we need to provide greater economic incentives to all landlords to increase the length of their tenancies.

Recent Trends

Increasingly, society is recognising the importance of suitable housing to mental health and well-being. Likewise, compromising housing justice leads to poor health, legal problems, inability to be employed, family breakdown, social isolation and homelessness. Social capital is increased when people work cooperatively in providing suitable housing for those with special needs.

Over one million Australian families were estimated as being in housing stress in 2007, with 61% of these (i.e. 600,000) living in private rental housing. By 2050, it is estimated that there could be an additional half million households in household stress, with younger households and lower income private renters both vulnerable, especially single-income households. The number of single person households is projected to increase from 26% of all households in 2008 to 31% of all household by 2028.

Principles for Good Housing

The peak non-government organisation, National Shelter, lists the following principles for ensuring the “right housing is available at the right cost in the right place at the right time”. It specifies that housing should be:

Affordable — no more than 30% of income spent on housing.

Adequate — meets basic standards of decency and their own basic needs.

Secure — a secure base from which to form constructive relationships, grow families and seek employment and community engagement.

Accessible — access to available options should be free from discrimination.

In the right place — located close to services and support networks, job opportunities and to social and leisure activities; encourage inclusion of people in community life.

Meets people’s lifecycle needs — people have different housing needs at different stages of their lives.
Shared Accommodation/ Housing: A Solution or Cause for Concern?

Share housing involves two or more tenants sharing a property and the associated costs of the accommodation. Share housing can be organised in many different ways, but generally fit into three categories:

i. co-tenancies where all sign and are equally responsible under one tenancy agreement;
ii. sub-tenancies, where the head tenant is responsible to the lessor/agent and the subtenants are responsible to the head tenant, and
iii. boarding houses and rooming style student accommodation.8

The clear advantage of shared accommodation lies in cost savings on rent, utilities and other costs depending on particular arrangements (e.g. share meals). Shared accommodation may also provide renters with company and the ability to keep their pets.

While there are some contexts where shared accommodation can provide an opportunity for socialisation, these might be more relevant for young people working or studying as they move out of home.

However, for others, especially those in older age groups, being reliant upon shared accommodation may be considered a disadvantage, either from a privacy perspective or a greater reluctance to “fit-in” or “get-along” with the other members of the shared household.

In addition, renters in shared accommodation may face additional financial and non-financial risks, especially where every individual is jointly responsible for the tenancy (e.g. a co-tenant may accidentally damage the property or leave without paying their rent). There may also be risks to personal safety.

Another disadvantage relates to the lack of legislative protection afforded to those reliant on shared accommodation. The Australian Capital Territory is the only jurisdiction which has specifically afforded legislative protection to all people generally under the Occupancy Agreement Regime. All other jurisdictions have adopted narrower or more specific definitions of “tenants”, and “lodgers”, thereby leaving out those that don’t meet the threshold requirements.

In Queensland, The Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008, has as its main objective, to state the rights and obligations of tenants, lessors and agents for residential tenancies; and residents, providers and agents for rooming accommodation.9

However, Queensland rooming accommodation “residents” are provided tenancy law protections, which are weaker than mainstream tenancy laws. Rooming accommodation arrangements are often done verbally, making dispute resolution difficult.

Same day terminations are allowed for serious breaches, but because there is no process for determining what constitutes a “serious breach”, the anecdotal evidence is that this mechanism is often used in an arbitrary way, with no checks and balances.

More importantly, if the provider, lessor or landlord lives on the premises then the rooming accommodation provisions of the Act will only apply if there are four or more rooms available for rent. If the provider or lessor does not live on the premises and rents out accommodation by the room then the rooming accommodation provisions apply, even if there are only one or two residents renting rooms in the place. Therefore, there are some shared housing arrangements which do not fall under the rooming accommodation provisions of the act, thereby affording them no legal protection.

Tenancy law reform is seen as playing an important role in preventing homelessness and improving services for people who are at risk of homelessness.

However, even with reform and improved rights for those in shared accommodation, the minimum rights for established under mainstream tenancy laws will not be sufficient to adequately achieve the goals of housing, in particular, the goal of security.10 For this, we need to look at the economics incentives or lack thereof, for long term tenancies.

Providing Economic Incentives for Longer Term Tenancies

“Recent research has confirmed that equity growth or capital gains are the key motivations for investors and that subsequently, intentions to invest or disinvest are, in the vast majority of cases, also driven by these economic factors and not by tenancy law.”11

Statistics show that renters were three times more likely than owner-occupiers to have changed address in the last 12 months.12 More than likely, this figure would be higher for lower income earners, and in particular, those in shared accommodation, than renters as a group.

Approximately 14.9% of private renters reported having no formal lease or tenure.13 Of those that did, 16.5% had an agreement for a month to month basis, 17.7% had an agreement for the duration of six months, 38.2% for 12 months, 3.7% for another fixed term and 7.5% had an indefinite tenure.

Given the dominance of economic factors over tenancy law about decisions to invest in rental housing, this suggests that economic factors are needed to more effectively achieve greater housing security.

In a similar vein to the recent initiative of the government to investment in the National Rental Affordability Scheme, whereby it offers tax incentives for private investors in rental property who price rentals at 20% below market rates for 10 year tenancies, perhaps there is a lot more that we could and should be doing.

For example, tax incentives could be used to encourage investors to provide longer tenancies, and may also reduce rental costs. This could be achieved by linking capital gains tax on the sale of rental properties to the length of tenancies. Against the foregone tax revenue, is the cost savings to the government in terms of the reduced level of legal costs, reduced negative impact on employment and social networks and less homelessness.

Footnotes

1. The actual date for the restoration was Saturday 10 April, 2010.
2. For example, see Department of Communities, Queensland, Housing Market Report, Private Rental Market, March quarter 2010, p2.
3. Mr. Adrian Pisarski, Chairperson of National Shelter, Media Release for Improved Rights may help to Reduce Homelessness, 29 April, 2010.
8. Welfare & Student Liaison Office, Student Services, Griffith University Information Sheet No. 9, Share Housing, January 2008.
9. In Queensland rooming accommodation is the term when someone has an agreement to rent a room only and share facilities with other residents/or be provided with services. Section 15 defines rooming accommodation as that accommodation if each of the residents:
   • has a right to occupy 1 or more rooms; and
   • does not have a right to occupy the whole of the premises, or rooms which the rooms are situated; and
   • does not occupy a self-contained unit; and
   • shares other rooms, or facilities outside of the resident’s room, with 1 or more of the other residents.
10. For example, even if those in shared accommodation were to be receive the same rights as mainstream tenants, in Queensland, which has a notice to remedy time period of 7 days and a notice to leave time of 7 days for mainstream tenants, this can hardly be considered “secure” from a practical perspective, especially given the economic and social costs of moving.
Six Star: Balancing the Benefits

By Jamie Muchall, Planning and Development Coordinator, Horizon Housing Company

A recent focus on the benefits of environmental sustainability in housing design has brought with it significant increases in the minimum environmental standards required for the construction of new houses, as well as a greater interest in incorporating sustainable features in dwellings.

Once the domain of more expensive properties, sustainable thinking has now moved into the affordable housing sphere. This can be seen in recent moves by the Queensland and Federal Governments to increase the sustainability and accessibility affordable housing, most notably in the Nation Building and Economic Stimulus Plan: Social Housing Initiative (NBSHI).

However, these changes conflict with current funding methods and rental models to create a situation which either will reduce the number of houses that can be provided by not for profit developers and community groups, or fail to see sustainability outcomes integrated into affordable housing. Many sustainable features have an up-front capital cost, with a payback period that is measured in years; however in a typical income or market-based rent model, this payback is not able to be recouped by the developer.

Increasing Sustainability

In recent years, there has been a shift in the way the ‘affordability’ of dwellings is assessed, from low cost construction, rent or purchase price, to a more holistic approach which considers the ongoing living costs for tenants and owners. This focus can be most recently seen under the NBSHI, the $6 billion fund for the development of 20,000 social housing dwellings across Australia; in Queensland, $1.2 billion is being used to create 4,000 dwellings.

Under this scheme, all dwellings constructed must meet a 6-star NATHERS rating and include efficient hot water systems, energy efficient lighting, water efficient showerheads and closing mechanisms on exhaust fans.

Outside the scheme, in Queensland, the minimum required green ratings for new buildings increased from 3.5 stars to 5 stars in March 2009, and from 5 stars to 6 in May 2010. Even if not required, providers are also looking to incorporate sustainable features such as solar systems or increased insulation in new or existing dwellings. The benefits of these design features are clear: reduced ongoing electricity and water bills, as well as reduced carbon emissions. A solar hot water system can save up to $346 a year, while insulation could save up to $289 per year per dwelling. For low income families, these benefits are even more pronounced; utilities can be up to 25% of expenses after rent or mortgage payments.

Getting Payback

While higher environmental standards and sustainability features increase the ongoing affordability of the dwellings for tenants, they do come at an up-front cost.

The Queensland Government estimates that making a typical five star house into a six-star dwelling adds 1.5% to the construction cost. The supply and installation of a 1.5kw PV Solar System can typically cost $3000–$5000. Such a system, at current prices, would pay back its installation costs in approximately 7 years, by reducing household electricity bills by approximately a third.

However, in all these cases, the savings would come in the form of reduced electricity and water bills, which are paid by the tenants, not the owner. In some cases, this may be considered a desirable outcome; it will, however reduce the number of dwellings that can be built for the same amount of funding. For example, assuming the estimated 1.5% cost of a 6 star over a 5 star dwelling, and additional 60 dwellings could have been built in Queensland under the NBSHI if they had only been required to meet 5 a star rating.

Typically, in dwellings constructed and then held by an owner-occupier, this up-front cost is offset by the long term savings in electricity and water bills. However, the Community Housing Rent Policy does not account for these extra savings for tenants when calculating rents.

In NRAS or non-government funded dwellings, market rent valuations rarely take into account these features, leaving the housing provider with no way of recouping these costs. If these standards are mandated, as with the NBSHI, the net result is that fewer dwellings are built for the same amount of funds. When not mandated, it would typically mean that not for profit developers with limited funds and marginal projects will not make the capital investment required for sustainable features, preferring to provide more dwellings. This is not an ideal solution, as the tenant, while now housed and no longer on the streets, is faced with power bills that they can ill afford.

Possible Solutions

There are a number of options that can be considered. The first is the status quo; forcing not for profit developers to include a minimum level of energy efficiency in dwellings to ensure that tenants benefit from lower ongoing water and electricity bills. This provides tenants with higher ongoing affordability, but at a cost of reduced dwelling numbers. One benefit is that over time, due to economies of scale and experience introduced by forced compliance, the cost premium is reduced for others wishing to enhance the sustainability of their buildings.

A second possible alternative is for not for profits to include electricity and water bills in the rent at a rate which could range from at-cost to market-priced. This would allow providers to recoup their upfront costs over time while still providing some savings to tenants, but is open to possible abuse.

A further solution would be to allow providers to charge a slightly higher proportion of income under the Community Housing Rent Policy for dwellings which the department has agreed meet a minimum standard of sustainability. Providers are currently allowed to charge 3% premium for furnished accommodation in recognition of the reduced costs to tenants; why not a premium in recognition of reduced power and water bills? The percentage premium could be determined by a study into the living costs of the tenants, and would be set at a level that would provide owners with an incentive to provide green housing (also encouraging a retrofit of existing dwellings) while still passing savings on to tenants.

Conclusion

While introducing higher standards for sustainability in affordable housing has established environmental and financial benefits, care has to be taken to ensure that they are aligned to provide the best outcome for all parties. Otherwise, there is a risk that either these features will not be incorporated at all, or will reduce the number of housing outcomes constructed to reduce homelessness in Queensland. Consideration and careful evaluation of the possible solutions is required.

Footnotes

1. The State of Queensland (Department of Infrastructure and Planning), Sustainability Declaration: Version 2, 4 February 2010.
The Landlord’s Just Not That Into You: An Examination of ‘Just Cos’ Evictions and the Magna Carta

By Janice McDonald, Coordinator of the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service — Brisbane Inner North

On the 15th of June 2010 it was the 795th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta at Runnymede, England in 1215.

I have always believed that the Magna Carta was a document of liberty and freedom, groundbreaking and influential to so many laws in so many different countries. So I had a look for it online and what did I find? I found a document that was sobering to say the least.

The Magna Carta is rife with such racism and sexism as to be mind-blowing.

To check out the full content please go to this link: http://www.britannia.com/history/docs/magna2.html

While I accept that it is a reflection of the standards and beliefs of the time it is still rather shocking to find these things in a document that I had formerly held in high regard.

It would be churlish, however, to dismiss it and to not to give the document it’s due. It is from here that we get many of the fundamental rights in law that have been handed down through the ages. The right to a trial by your peers, not to be imprisoned unjustly and the right to a speedy trial all come from the long shadow cast by this well yellowed document. All of these things still resonate within our legal system.

In fact there are a number of concepts in this document that we can learn from today such as these:

……to no one will we refuse or delay, right or justice.

Neither we nor our bailiffs shall seize for any debt any land or rent, so long as the chattels of the debtor are sufficient to repay the debt.
What got me thinking was how the original drafters of the Magna Carta would feel if they knew that even after almost 800 years that people in Queensland can be refused justice. We have made such great strides against racism and sexism and yet we still allow this enshrined injustice. What injustice you ask? The right to be taken out of your home without cause or reason as a tenant and the right to be removed from a boarding house on one day’s notice.

These are burning issues for homelessness. The Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home recognises their impacts as stated below:

Most state and territory tenancy legislation permits “without-grounds” termination” of a tenancy agreement by a landlord. As a result, a tenant may be legally given notice and forced to leave their rented home through no fault of their own. In such a circumstance, people become homeless if they are unable to find other housing that is suitable or affordable. Tasmania is the only jurisdiction where tenancy legislation is subject to a periodic or continuing agreement. The Australian Government will review the impact of “without-grounds” clauses on homelessness in state and territory tenancy legislation, and the lack of legislative protection for boarders and lodgers in some jurisdictions. As part of this review it will consider the impact of any proposed changes on landlords and future investment in rental housing.

It is gratifying that this issue is now being scrutinised both federally and within the State. What I want to focus on in this article is the “without grounds” issue. It is often called “Just Cause” evictions but I think of it as “Just Cost” evictions as in the sentence “I’m evicting you just cos I can”. Whenever this issue is raised there are always cries of “THE SKY WILL FALL IN!” from industry bodies and lessors. They spout unrealistic fears including that tenants will be “impossible” to remove or that tenants will “take control” of their property. Just cause evictions have been common in European countries for decades. If the industry bodies and lessors understood what just cause actually entails, it is certain that most would have no problem with it. What it means is that you cannot evict a tenant without a reason and those reasons can be extensive.

For example, if you own a house and rent it out and you want to sell it, renovate it, move in yourself or move in your Aunt Flo, then that’s a reason a “cause”. These examples are not an exhaustive list and any legislation would reasonably contain wording such as “any other reason the Tribunal considers appropriate”. Logically, if you remove the ability to remove someone from their home without any reason, then you are only removing “reasons” of discrimination and retaliation.

Every day in our work at the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service in Brisbane’s inner city we see tenants being given “without grounds” notice due to them exercising their rights. While Queensland tenancy legislation does contain a provision for a tenant to dispute a termination they feel is retaliatory it has been ineffective and unevenly applied. As long as lessors can say; “we don’t have to give a reason”, great injustice will continue. No-one can be fired from their job without a reason, so why should people lose their housing without one?

Tenants we speak to are often shocked that there is nothing they can do to fight a “without grounds” eviction. “It’s just not fair!” they often say. Well they’ve got us there because we don’t think it’s fair either.

I am certain that industry bodies are aware of the impact of just cause evictions. However, at times of legislative review, they find traction by using scare tactics to influence government. They shriek that lessors will not invest in housing despite research establishing that “just cause” regulation is not an indicator of entering or exiting rental property investment. This is borne out by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute’s research.1

There is no downside for property investors in this proposed change. Scare mongering to gain an unjust outcome is the work of scoundrels. There has never been a cogent or reasoned argument to support unfounded fears.

The Queensland Government has shown considerable foresight and courage to become the first state to bring in regulation of tenancy databases. This legislation is now being used as a guide for tenancy database regulation throughout the country. The government saw that the misuse of databases was impacting negatively on homelessness with people being made homeless unjustly due to retaliatory and subjective listings. The Government must be rightly proud of this prudent action and for being a leader in this area of tenancy law reform. Three cheers for the smart state!

What is certain is that while “without grounds” evictions remain in Queensland tenancy legislation, this too will continue to impact on homelessness. In this time of global financial crisis this reform is an easy and equitable step to take for our State. It is a way to “turn off the tap” as the White Paper on Homelessness states without ongoing funding for any program. What it does is stop discrimination and retaliation in its tracks, two enemies of justice and good government.

The Queensland Government has already shown that it has the moral courage to make the tough choices and change laws where they are unfair, such as the database regulation. I’m sure it will have the steel to reform “without grounds” evictions and win one for tenants who are now 52% of Queensland’s population. The Government is already against unfair dismissal in the workplace and I’m sure is against unfair dismissal from your home.

There is a great opportunity for the Government to leave a legacy. From this one amendment to tenancy laws they will be giving future generations of Queenslanders a fair go.

Homelessness is a complex issue but this one is easy: get rid of “without grounds” evictions and keep many people from becoming homeless in the first place. I’m asking Queenslanders to look to the future and see the kind of State that they can continue to be proud of by giving tenants just cause to lose their housing instead of “Just Cos”.

There is one other quote from the Magna Carta that I like and I think it’s appropriate to finish with it. It’s a small sentence only four words and very little words at that, but sometimes the little words can be heard the loudest, just as they loudly resonated in 1215.

Let right be done.

Footnote

1. “Understanding what motivates households to become and remain investors in the private rental market” by Tim Seelig, Alice Thompson, Terry Burke, Simon Pinnegar, Sean McNelis and Alan Morris for the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Queensland, UNSW-UWS, and Swinburne-Monash Research Centres, AHURI Final Report No. 130 March 2009
50 Lives 50 Homes: A Campaign to House and Support Brisbane’s Fifty Most Vulnerable Homeless People

By Helen Styles, Community Liaison and Business Services and Karyn Walsh, Coordinator, Micah Projects

Introduction

At the Homeless to Home Healthcare Forum in Brisbane on 11 June this year, Premier Anna Bligh was presented with the results of a survey designed to identify Brisbane’s most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. While the Premier addressed the 200 strong audience, a photographic slide show of the people surveyed played on a screen behind her. As she spoke, the Queensland Premier’s eyes were continually drawn to the faces of men and women who sleep rough in the state’s capital. The stark reality of their living standards and the obvious physical toll it has taken on them told the stories the statistics could not.

The Forum was held as part of the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign to house and support the fifty homeless people in Brisbane whose age, length of time spent homeless and prevalence of chronic health conditions leaves them vulnerable to premature death. The Forum was held as part of the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign to house and support the fifty homeless people in Brisbane whose age, length of time spent homeless and prevalence of chronic health conditions leaves them vulnerable to premature death.

The campaign is led by local community organisation Micah Projects in partnership with American supportive housing provider Common Ground and based on similar campaigns conducted in the USA.

Lead agency Micah Projects through the Street to Home Partnership Forum initiated the 50 Lives 50 Homes campaign in response to the targets to reduce homelessness in Australia set by The Road Home White Paper.

The targets to halve homelessness overall and offer accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020 have been criticised for being too ambitious. But Micah Projects and its partners see the targets as achievable, especially when broken down into ‘bite-size pieces’, starting with the most chronically homeless and involving the broader community in the task; working in partnership with government, other not for profit organisations, health professionals, citizens, media, community groups and schools.

“We had recently been successful in the tender for the boosted Street to Home service in which particular targets for housing rough sleepers are to be met as part of the funding,” says Karyn Walsh, Coordinator of Micah Projects. “We thought setting a goal of housing fifty people was an achievable number. And we thought: if we’re going to start with fifty, they should be the fifty whose lives are most at risk by remaining homeless. Once we’ve housed them and they are receiving the support they need to maintain their housing, we’ll move onto the next fifty, and then the next fifty until we have housed all of the chronically homeless people in Brisbane. We know by working together, in partnership we can make a difference.”

Vulnerability Index

The first stage of the campaign was to develop a registry, name-by-name of each individual experiencing chronic homelessness in Brisbane. Luckily, Common Ground has been doing this work for years and was only too happy to share its strategies and tools for kicking off the campaign. In 2007 Common Ground conducted the first ‘Project 50’ campaign among the homeless of Los Angeles’ notorious Skid Row.

Dubbed by many in LA as ‘impossible to house’, the hundreds of people sleeping rough at the site were surveyed using a tool called the Vulnerability Index. The fifty most vulnerable were identified and accommodated in permanent supportive housing where all but two remain to this day (one person passed away and another moved to an aged care facility).

The Vulnerability Index is based upon research by Dr Jim O’Connell of Boston’s Health Care for the Homeless. Dr O’Connell is regarded in the USA as the leading expert on the provision of healthcare for people who are chronically homeless. He has literally written the manual on the health conditions that are common among people who are chronically homeless.1 Dr O’Connell’s prolific research identified a group of eight key health indicators shared in common by men and women he was treating who died prematurely; indicators that their health was being ruined by their homelessness.

Building on this research, Common Ground developed the Vulnerability Index to identify these health risk indicators among the homeless population in order to prioritise those who are most vulnerable to dying on the streets. They started using the Vulnerability Index with people sleeping rough in New York City’s Times Square until all people were identified and housed. Only one person now remains homeless in Times Square. The eight major indicators the Index searches for are:

• end stage renal disease;
• cirrhosis/liver disease;
• aged over 60 years;
• HIV/AIDS;
• history of cold or wet weather injuries; more than three hospitalisations or emergency room visits in the past year;
• more than three emergency room visits in the past three months; and
• tri-morbidity (a term coined by Dr O’Connell), the co-occurrence of psychiatric, medical and substance abuse problems.

According to the Index, an individual is deemed ‘vulnerable’ (to premature death) if they have been homeless for over six months and have at least one of the eight risk indicators.

As well as collecting the name and age of homeless individuals and their health status, the Index captures data on their institutional history (prison, hospital, military, etc.), length of homelessness, crisis accommodation use and previous housing situation. The surveys are administered by community volunteers in a methodical canvassing of places and spaces where people sleep rough. Respondents who consent are photographed where they sleep for future identification. This aids in guaranteeing consistency among teams of outreach workers.

Once the data is collected, it is entered into a database, creating a by-name registry of homeless people in an area. These people are then ranked according to their age and prevalence of health indicators. This ranking is only a guide as it is impossible to compare one person’s vulnerability with another’s. Prioritisation informs the decision making process when matching available resources in housing and support services to an individual’s need. The prioritisation can change at any point when an individual’s circumstances change.

Common Ground has now assisted many communities to complete the Vulnerability Index with over 14,000 Americans surveyed.

It recently launched the 100,000 Homes Campaign to find housing for 100,000
chronically homeless Americans at the National Ending Homelessness Conference in Washington DC. City by city, Vulnerability Index registry weeks are contributing to the nationwide efforts to identify and house the “individuals and families who remain trapped in homelessness and dependant upon costly emergency services.” The campaign outlines a five step process for accomplishing its goals in communities across the USA:

1. Build a strong local team and develop the political will;
2. Clarify the demand (for housing and services);
3. Line up housing and support resources;
4. Move people into housing, and
5. Help people stay housed.³

50 Lives 50 Homes is recognised as an international partner in the campaign.

A Community Responds

Micah Projects convened the Brisbane Street to Home Partnership Forum in 2009 with participants and partnering agencies working with people sleeping rough across the city. These include local and state government agencies and community organisations. When Founder and President of Common Ground, Rosanne Haggerty told the story of Project 50 to the Forum late last year, the group was unanimous in its enthusiasm to see the same process used in Brisbane.

50 Lives 50 Homes was formalised as a campaign with Micah Projects as lead agency. Micah Projects was successful in an application to the Mater Foundation for funding to bring Becky Kanis and Beth Sandor, based with Common Ground in LA, to Brisbane to lead the registry week. Dr Jim O’Connell also travelled to Brisbane for the event.

The starting point was to involve the broader community in the campaign by building on partnerships with government and non-government service providers, small business, corporates, media, local community members and one very committed school.

The 50 Lives 50 Homes partners included: Micah Projects, Common Ground USA, Mater Health Services, Queensland Health, Queensland Police Service, Brisbane City Council, Goori Referral Centre, SANDBAG, OzCare, Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House Centacare, Spiritus, Mission Australia, The 139 Club, 99 Consulting, Brisbane Youth Service, Mume Watch, Pindari Women’s Hostel, the Salvation Army, Minter Ellison and Grocon Constructions.

Building upon the Street to Home Partnership Forum, this network of agencies planned for registry week with Jon Eastgate and Helen Wallace from 99 Consulting assisting the Micah Projects campaign team to develop and implement a project plan.

Helen and Jon met with housing providers, local government representatives, health professionals and other stakeholders. The project team lead met with regional area offices for public housing. Health professionals gave input to the index and planning with Becky and Beth occurred through email and Skype technology.

Administering the Vulnerability Index in a city the size of Brisbane requires scores of volunteers while a specialised volunteer team is required to enter the data from the surveys into the database. These were recruited through existing relationships with community groups including the St Mary’s Community, Minter Ellison Lawyers, Grocon Constructions, and locals from West End, where Micah Projects is based. All Hallows’ School offered its premises located in the heart of the city as a place to train volunteers and use a base on survey mornings.

The campaign was officially launched by Cr Geraldine Knapp at All Hallows’ on the training night, Monday 7 June. Over 70 volunteers gathered as well as staff from partnering organisations to be trained by Becky and Beth in how to administer the survey. Students from the University of Queensland had been fundraising to support 50 Lives 50 Homes and they presented fifty kettles to go to the first fifty people housed through the campaign.

Then over the next three mornings (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) 19 teams led by experienced outreach workers, canvassed the streets of the Brisbane metropolitan area, targeting parks, public spaces, food vans, emergency accommodation, youth shelters and known squats.

The teams went to the same sites over the three mornings between 4am–7am in an effort to meet people before they packed up and left the space for the day. Agencies providing services and emergency accommodation joined the campaign and undertook the survey with their residents or had a team of volunteers visit their service and engage with residents to complete the Vulnerability Index.

The teams were supported by parents from All Hallows’ who provided breakfast on each of the mornings. In the beachside community of Sandgate, SANDBAG coordinated a local neighbourhood team to administer the Index and follow up on the campaign.

The Results

The campaign had now created a by-name registry of 231 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and rough sleeping in Brisbane. It was found that half (51%) of those surveyed fell into the ‘vulnerable’ category. On the last day of registry week, the results were presented to the community at the Homeless to Home Healthcare Forum.

Key Results

- 249 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness in Brisbane;¹
- 231 (93%) consented to take part in the survey;
- 83% consented to being photographed;
- 118 (51%) were found to have health conditions associated with a high mortality risk — the vulnerable population;
- 156 (68%) were identified as rough sleepers, of whom 83 were found to have health conditions associated with a high mortality risk;
- 16 respondents were over 55 years old, the oldest being 79 years old;
- The longest reported length of homelessness was 40 years;
- The average years homeless for the vulnerable population was 7.7 years;
- The average years homeless for the non-vulnerable population was four years;
- 59 (26%) people reported as having a history of Foster Care;
- 31 respondents were under 25 years old;
- The youngest respondent was 17 years old;²
- 13 of those surveyed identified as Veterans, 7 of whom met the criteria for ‘vulnerable’;
- 118 (51%) people reported a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse;
- 66 people reported a history of substance abuse only;
- 105 people reported intravenous drug use;
- 202 people reported at least one behavioural health issue, and
- 48 people identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 19 as New Zealanders.
Hidden Costs of Homelessness

Several questions on the Vulnerability Index asked about an individual’s use of emergency services and incarceration. Information available in the 2010 Productivity Commission reports was used to estimate the costs associated with these individuals use of these public systems. Please note: these cost estimates are indicative of public system use and are not precise.

- A total of 320 inpatient hospitalisations were reported in the prior three months, at an estimated annual cost of $1,355,040 over twelve months (Est. $4,172 per visit Productivity Commission 2010 average Queensland figure);4
- A total of 1,184 Emergency Room visits are estimated by all respondents in the prior three months at an estimated annual cost of $932,992 (Est. $197 per visit, NSW figure, Queensland figure not available);5 and
- 109 people reported having been to prison. Based on a 3 month stay, estimated cost is $2,638,890. Based on a 6 month stay, estimated cost is $5,277,780.6

Action Plan: Housing People from the Registry

“What is important about the campaign is that we now know by name and face the people we need to house. We also have the supporting information we need to help them to be housed and stay housed”, says Karyn Walsh.

Micah Projects is now leading the efforts to match permanent housing and services for those on the register. It is working with the Queensland public housing system and community housing providers to secure permanent housing.

“Housing and supporting people to create a home requires partnerships between all agencies involved in housing, health, healthcare and social support as well as the active participation of all the community”, says Karyn. “The community of Brisbane is committed to doing more as we house, support and link in health services to the first 50 people on the register. It will have a significant impact on how we respond to people experiencing chronic homelessness and sleeping rough in Brisbane.”

For the volunteers and outreach workers, the week was a moving and memorable experience. They were profoundly affected by the people they met and the stories they told. 50 Lives 50 Homes established Facebook and Twitter accounts for volunteers to share their stories and stay in touch with the progress of the campaign.

One story of a teenaged woman who had been homeless for four years and still attending school struck one of the volunteers from Grocon. He has since led the way in fundraising several thousand dollars to furnish her new home and support her study.

Recently a 50 Lives 50 Homes Community and Stakeholders Committee was established to support the campaign. Comprised mainly of survey volunteers, the Committee is drawing up an action plan for advocacy and fundraising to support the housing efforts.

50 Lives 50 homes has demonstrated just how much the people of Brisbane want to see a difference among the most vulnerable members of the community.

Eight weeks after registry week, four people have moved into permanent housing, including the 79 year old person identified through the Vulnerability Index. He was so thrilled to have the keys to his own unit he has refused to let them out of his sight.

Several couples that were identified, some living in their cars, are accommodated in transitional housing and boarding houses while permanent solutions are sought. One by one, people are being housed off the registry and are supported by Micah Projects Street to Home team to link into health and other essential services required to assist them to maintain their housing so they do not become homeless again.

Micah Projects has learnt that the by-name registry is an invaluable tool for housing these individuals and demonstrating their housing and support needs. It is also learning that matching housing to individuals and coordinating services requires a whole of community approach.

It is time consuming and challenging and Common Ground has learned that it can take months to process housing applications and make the necessary referrals. Organisations involved are learning to work together to synchronise their processes so that the individual gets the services they need.

Many of the most vulnerable people identified through 50 Lives 50 Homes will need to be supported in their housing for the rest of their lives. Some do not have much longer left to live, but Micah Projects maintains that its work now is to make these people comfortable so they can die in peace and with dignity.

The Homeless to Home Healthcare Forum launched the Homeless to Home Healthcare Network in order to bring together health agencies and individual health professionals committed to doing whatever it takes to make service systems more responsive to the lives of people who are homeless.

This is in juxtaposition to the current model of services where vulnerable people have to fit into complex systems to ensure they have a home, access to healthcare and their rightful place in community. People who are chronically homeless are so due to both their own personal circumstances and because they fall through the cracks of service systems.

Organisations in Sydney and Melbourne are now planning to conduct their own campaigns to house and support their vulnerable homeless populations. Brisbane’s registry week was greatly enhanced by the participation of skilled workers from these cities and it was an excellent opportunity for the newly funded Street to Home teams in other capital cities to meet each other.

Those working in respective roles within Brisbane’s homelessness sector have been challenged by the results of the campaign. It is not simply a matter of talking about people who have to change, or systems that have to do things differently; the vision of ending homelessness for these 231 people must be kept alive.

The experience cannot be allowed go back into the darkness of the night hidden in the streets of Brisbane. What has now been started must be completed by continuing to work together and change whatever needs to be changed so that people are not left on the streets until they die. Too many already have.

Micah Projects is a community organisation providing a range of support and advocacy services to individuals and families experiencing social injustice in Brisbane. Micah Projects acknowledges the work of the campaign team that led 50 Lives 50 Homes including Karyn Walsh, Briannon Stevens, Jenny Schultz, Helen Styles, Robyn McDonald and Jim DeCusto and Noel Herbert from Street to Home.

Learn more:
Find 50 Lives 50 Homes on Facebook and follow @50lives50homes on Twitter
Micah Projects: www.micahprojects.org.au
Common Ground: www.commonground.org
100,000 Homes: www.100khomes.org
Boston’s Healthcare for the Homeless: www.bhchp.org

Footnotes
4. NB: Registry Week for 50 Lives 50 Homes was not a census of people who are homeless in Brisbane.
5. Several families were identified but only adults were surveyed. The Vulnerability Index is not designed to be administered to children. Common Ground USA has developed an Index for families experiencing homelessness and Micah Projects hopes to survey families in the coming months.
Suburban Action: A Case Study for Family Homelessness

By Members of the South Queensland Council for Homeless Persons

This article will give a glimpse of the value and significant efforts of community organisations to reduce the effects of homelessness through building strong inclusive communities enabling people to remain in their communities.

Introduction

Ordinary, lifeless, disconnected or boring are words often used to describe the suburbs, those areas of cities where families live. The views of policy makers and others may well leave people thinking of homelessness as a problem for inner cities, yet those living in the suburbs know this is far from accurate.

Family and individual homelessness often originates in the suburbs of Australia’s large cities such as Brisbane. Thankfully the descriptions of those boring, lifeless suburbs are far from the truth when it comes to the small, dedicated community organisations working in our suburbs supporting families and individuals who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Amy’s story demonstrates how a small community agency provides ‘soft entry points’ allowing access to services and activities within a welcoming and supportive environment. This holistic approach to service delivery for vulnerable families goes beyond the ‘band aid’ and enables them to move along a continuum of service delivery that fosters social inclusion from the beginning.

Strong long term relationship with the worker provides the foundation for inclusion. There is strong and ongoing support, as opposed to a crisis response on its own, (demand alone can result in people receiving a crisis response only in busy city areas). The smaller community size means it is often more vigilant to the needs of community members, and early interventions can be applied quickly and effectively should the need arise.

The valued features of local small agencies often reflect community development and social inclusion approaches. Usually operations are highly integrated and reliant upon the local community. They provide clients with a local point of contact and ongoing service provision that functions as an access point to resources to stabilise housing when necessary. A strong focus and interest in building the capacity and resilience of the local community is common.

Clients often experience a richer therapeutic relationship that facilitates the achievement of community belonging, social inclusion and prevention and early intervention strategies.

The extent and numbers of people presenting in housing need often leads to the work of local small scale community agencies being overlooked or devalued. Service delivery agencies that are able to operate on high volume case management based outcomes, accompanied by efficient organisational structures are often favoured by funding bodies with limited resources.

In conclusion we urge funding bodies and others involved in program development and service delivery to recognise and appreciate the value of the smaller suburban service and to be mindful of the need for strategies that will enable both the service provider and more significantly, the voices of families who access these services to be heard. They have a lot to teach us.

South Queensland Council for Homeless Persons is a member of the Council for Homeless Persons Australia.

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Amy’s Story

When Amy and her 5 year old son contacted the local SAAP service in a Brisbane suburb, she was frightened, desperate and alone, totally overwhelmed by her situation. She had sold off her furniture and household items to pay debts. Following the breakdown of her marriage after only 5 years of living in Australia, Amy was abandoned and homeless. She was couch surfing in a friend’s home, had no job, no income and very little money and child custody issues.

Amy was not coping emotionally and was in need of immediate crisis support and housing.

The local SAAP service responded to Amy’s immediate crisis needs including crisis accommodation, and emotional and practical support. Once Amy was settled the service assisted her to access the services required to resolve the child custody situation and the associated legal matters. A budget and financial plan was put in place and Amy was supported to work with creditors to avoid legal action and credit defaults. In due course she was awarded sole custody of her son and made significant financial improvements at becoming debt-free.

During this time Amy began to meet people in the local community. She and her son attended the weekly play group attached to the Community Centre which operated the SAAP service. The Community Centre had a variety of local activities and support groups available aimed at building social inclusion. Amy became interested in, and took up belly dancing as well as participating in other activities.

Amy was invited to contribute her story to a local Multicultural Project. She took great delight at being asked if she would cook a traditional dish from her country of origin for the project launch. With her confidence growing Amy then volunteered her culinary skills for all future events at the Community Centre including Open Day, Harmony Day and the Community Christmas party.

Amy had integrated so well into the community she held her son’s birthday at the centre and invited many of the locals. Amy felt she belonged in this place and that she had “family” again.

Amy’s story demonstrates the value of a small, coordinated, community based program response.

Responses to her needs were delivered in meaningful, inclusive and enjoyable ways that valued and harnessed her strengths, skills and abilities as well as acknowledging the vulnerabilities. These localized successful responses enable Amy to transition from homelessness into long term housing by providing practical resources and assisting Amy to build social connections that provided emotional support and encouragement and soft reentry points to services if needed.

She now enjoys belonging to and participating in the local school and wider community activities.
By Liz Don, 
Tenant Rooming Advocate, 
Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service, 
Brisbane Inner North

In 2001 I started my first social work placement at the New Farm Neighbourhood Centre (NFNC), which also managed the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS) for Brisbane’s inner northern suburbs. At this time I had never heard of TAAS Queensland, but I instantly identified with the organisation, its values and empowerment model. I couldn’t decide which area of social work to go into as I didn’t want to be a “social worker” in the traditional sense.

What I soon learned was that TAAS Queensland helps prevent homelessness by assisting people to use tenancy rights to sustain housing. Funding comes predominantly from the interest earned on tenants’ bonds, so it’s almost a user pays system.

In 2002 I started paid work as a relief worker at TAAS Inner North. I was stunned to learn that people renting a room only, with shared facilities, had no tenancy rights. Residents were covered by common law agreements; however, as these were often not put in writing, residents were unaware of the terms of their agreement. Consumers had more rights in getting their money back on a faulty back scratcher than a person did in their own home!

Without legislative rights, residents living in boarding houses were often immediately evicted for ludicrous and unsubstantiated reasons. Due to the immediacy of the eviction residents often lost all their belongings. Just think about your own stuff.

In 2002 the Residential Services (Accommodation) Act 2002 and the Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002 were introduced. The first Act established tenancy rights and obligations for residents for the first time in Queensland; the second set out regulations and standards such as building compliance, food regulation and fire safety.

This legislation was a bold step for Queensland as, apart from Victoria, there were limited rights for boarders and lodgers in other states in Australia. Although the more cynical would say that it was a knee jerk reaction to the Childers backpacker fire I choose to believe that the introduction of tenancy rights for residents was based on some sort of understanding of the need to secure peoples’ tenure and their rights and obligations.

Nevertheless this was a joyous time; the State was abuzz! Finally Queensland had legislation that outlined residents and providers’ rights and obligations. The Accommodation Act set out a legislative framework, not limited to:

• setting out both the residents and providers rights and obligations.
• access to the Small Claims Tribunal, and
• a dispute resolution process;
• rent receipts issued on acceptance of rent, and
• timeframes to remedy breaches.

Whilst this legislation was pivotal it was however severely undermined by the self eviction power to remove a resident (on grounds of an alleged serious breach of the agreement) and without grounds eviction provisions. This was so much the case that most residents were too fearful of eviction to enforce their rights.

I believe that the absence of a right of reply in evictions undermines the effectiveness of the Act. Every day in TAAS Inner North we deal with residents who have disputes with providers or caretakers. Providers often use the immediate eviction provision as a catch-all for getting rid of anyone who disagrees with them or seeks to exercise their rights.

For example, we saw a resident who stated the toilets had not been cleaned for three weeks. We advised the resident of their rights and what action they could take including worst case scenario: eviction; and best case scenario: a clean toilet. The resident decided that if the toilets were not clean then he wouldn’t live there and chose to exercise his rights and issue a notice. This was not an unreasonable thing to do especially with an average of ten residents per toilet.

The resident was immediately issued with a notice to leave and was given four days to move out. Regardless of the fact that it was an invalid notice to leave, the resident could still be removed from the property. After the eviction the resident could go to the Tribunal and make a compensation claim for any financial loss suffered from the eviction … Hmm, needless to say this line doesn’t go down too well!

The resident didn’t want to dispute the notice nor did he want to stay in the premises, he’d had enough. He had lived in the boarding for four years: it was his home. He was essentially evicted over complaining that the toilets were not cleaned and could be smelt down the hall.

This was the problem with the Accommodation Act, as it legitimised evictions without a third party intervention. Residents were always afraid they’d be evicted if they exercised their rights. They had seen it happen to countless other residents!

Self evictions, power to remove a resident and without ground provisions significantly undermine the intent of the legislation and make it very difficult for residents to exercise their rights. Most residents just moved out and tried to find somewhere else to live, many becoming homeless in order to not live under a dictatorship.

But residents are not just leaving a building. They are leaving their home and old and new friends who often have become as close as family. This includes other residents on whom they can rely when things are tough and people with whom they enjoy camaraderie. As one resident once said to me, “It’s not great, but it’s home”.

Working with this legislation, that seemed to conspire against everything we tried to do, was a daily frustration for workers; no doubt this frustration was ten times worse for people actually living in boarding houses. We needed to warn residents of retaliatory eviction if they wished to try to enforce their...
rights. We are sure the intention of the immediate eviction provisions was not to evict residents because they complained the loo was smelly or asked for rent receipts!

Needless to say, the introduction of the Residential Services (Accommodation) Act 2002 was certainly a disappointment and seemed to enshrine provider’s rights rather than protect those of residents.

Regardless of fines being attached to breaches by Providers we were witnessing blatant non-compliance with the legislation. It’s hard to undertake effective advocacy where there is nothing to stop an immediate eviction. You can’t shore up a flooding riverbank without any sandbags.

By this time I had been a full-time rooming worker for some years. We knew the Act was to be reviewed and felt sure that we could get the legislation in a fair and workable condition. This may seem like we are a bit full of ourselves, that we want to play the champion, but isn’t it our job to give a voice to those who have none? It just seemed so obvious to us that this legislation was not working. Surely the aim of the Acts wasn’t to enshrine a person’s misuse of power to an extent where they could unjustly evict a person from their home at will.

What we strongly advocated for was a provision about quiet enjoyment, urgent access to the Tribunal to dispute an eviction and the complete removal of the serious breach and power to remove provisions.

Last year the Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 commenced. Once again TAAS Inner North has been involved in the process of lobbying for law reform, and we knew what was coming.

The new Act did have some great new content such as a provision around quiet enjoyment, and the option to opt into a rooming accommodation or general tenancy (to name a few).

The provisions that undermined the legislation stayed, however, again ensuring that people living in boarding houses and hostels would be still be classed as second class citizens, with residents not allowed the legal right to challenge an eviction in the Tribunal before it occurs.

Nine years on and for people living in a boarding house or hostel in Queensland, not much has changed. They can still be evicted without grounds, can still be evicted immediately and if they fail to leave on time “reasonable force” can be used to escort the person from their home. It is unconscionable that in Queensland, where we have such a “high” standard of living, people are still treated this way.

The average cost for a room in an inner city boarding house in Brisbane can range from anything from $110 to $210 per week. As you can imagine the condition of many of these premises can be pretty small and shabby. The point that I’m trying to make is that it’s just not good enough that people living in boarding houses and hostels are charged so much for so little.

Anecdotally we have been hearing of an alarming proposed trend regarding a change to the definition of tertiary homelessness; tertiary homelessness is no longer to be considered a category of homelessness!

That’s great for the stats: in one fell swoop the homelessness numbers have decreased by a third. Now what happens to the people experiencing tertiary homelessness in boarding houses, whose homes fall below community standards of acceptable housing and who don’t have security of tenure? They’re still out there and in need of assistance. Instead of trying to cook the books with the stats let’s try to secure peoples’ tenancy through better legislation.

The Road Home, The Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness has recognised the importance of better legislative protection for boarders and lodgers.

“The Australian Government will review the impact of ‘without-grounds termination’ clauses on homelessness in state and territory tenancy legislation, and the lack of legislative protection for boarders and lodgers in some jurisdictions.”

It has long been a fact that boarding houses are the first path in and out of homelessness. This makes boarding house legislation vital to ‘Turning Off the Tap’ as they say in the White Paper.

During my time at TAAS Inner North I often think of something when I go home at night. I would like to put forward this scenario for your consideration as I believe it helps put things in perspective.

Just think when you’re getting into your warm, comfortable bed tonight in the home you might own (a bit or all of) or rent. Just think for a moment what it would be like for you if just before you went to bed you went to clean your teeth, exchanged a few words with someone you lived with about something you think is pretty trivial. Then as you’re just getting to sleep someone burst into your room without any notice and told you to get out right now for fighting with another resident and you could do absolutely nothing to stop it legally? What would you do? Where would you go? What would you do with your stuff? How would you feel that you could be treated this way because you weren’t considered important?

If anything in this article has resonated with you then I encourage you to lobby your state member to assist people living in boarding houses and hostels through stronger, more meaningful tenancy legislation.

Let’s try to ensure their rights are protected through stronger tenancy laws and lobby for the removal of without grounds evictions, immediate evictions and power to remove a resident so we can all sleep soundly at night.
Affordable Housing in the Boom

By Margaret Robertson, Tenant Advice, Mackay

While affordable housing is a national issue it is taken on specific guises in Queensland. The pattern of economic development and in particular the more recent booms have created patterns of displacement and specific housing and affordable housing issues no prevalent elsewhere.

The mining boom in the hinterland of Mackay has created prosperity for some and homelessness for others. Over the last few years we have watched hopelessly as a number of client groups faced the reality of a rental market that no longer meets their needs. With the increase in the number of tenants on high incomes the reality of a rental market that no longer meets their needs. With the increase in the number of tenants on high incomes the rental market changed.

The decreasing vacancy rate and increasing cost of rent gradually forced people out of their housing and into homelessness. A number of responses were tried to keep a roof over their heads but the long term reality placed a high demand on the private rental market. This has shown in a strong demand for four bedroom houses and single bedroom units and boarding houses where miners are also moving into the single bedroom units and boarding houses where they can get cheap accommodation to sleep in during their time off.

The following excerpts are from the Annual Reports presented by the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service in Mackay to the Annual General Meeting of the Community Housing and Information Centre Inc.

2002
After a higher vacancy rate for houses last year, the market has slowly tightened to a very low vacancy rate again now. It is now difficult to locate houses for rent. An increase in mining related activity and large construction projects in the region have placed a high demand on the private rental market. The cost of rentals has remained stable but this may change with the demand at present.

2003
The private market has slowly tightened to a very low vacancy rate; the tightest for thirty years. This has been maintained all this year driving up rents especially in the higher end of the market. This has meant those with the low income, database listings, and large families have been pushed into crisis housing options.

The opening of new mines in the hinterland has caused a high demand on the private rental market. This has shown in a strong demand for four bedroom houses and single miners are also moving into the single bedroom units and boarding houses where they can get cheap accommodation to sleep in during their time off.

2004
The private market has continued to tighten to a very low vacancy rate with rent increases not seen in Mackay for some years. The combination of an expansion of the mining industry and a property sales boom as meant a constantly changing private rental market.

The mining companies continue hiring contract workers but they have not provided permanent housing for new workers. Contractors have supplied housing and meals for their workers during work times in hinterland hotels, motels, and accommodation centres of dongas.

Most contract workers and their families live in Mackay or other main towns and only go into the hinterland for their work. Mining companies seem reluctant to provide bricks and mortar but rely on the local private rental and commercial market to provide housing.

This has put extreme pressure on local towns of the hinterland and regional centres. Miners usually have the income to take housing at the higher end of the market but some use the lower end of the market for temporary housing during time off. This has put pressure on affordable housing especially in boarding houses and caravan parks.

2005
The private market has had a very low vacancy rate all year with rents steadily increasing. Many owners have taken advantage of the rising house sale prices to sell or renovate then sell their investment properties. The influx of miners continues to affect the rental market.

New comers are renting until they can buy or renting for the length of their work contracts. The opening of new mines in the area has put housing at a premium in the hinterland with all housing and accommodation constantly full. Sleeping in cars and “hot bedding” has been used to provide overnight accommodation.

Hot bedding is when workers on opposite work shifts share the use of one bed. This works unless someone gets sick and needs the bed during their usual work time.

Many tenants with good references are unable to locate suitable housing in the short time frames given to vacate. It has become more common for families to share or move in with another family to respond to transition in housing. Not only single income individuals but single income families are being squeezed out of the market.

With the average length of a tenancy in Mackay being less than 12 months, tenants are constantly on the move and paying for yearly removals and cleaning. Caravan parks and boarding houses are also running at capacity with few vacancies.

The social housing system is almost at a standstill with record lows in turnover in the Department of Housing and the Community Rent Scheme.
The emergency housing agencies are also working to capacity, having to turn away eligible clients and keep some clients well beyond their maximum stay because there are no exit options.

Caravan parks in the area are changing. Some are upgrading to more resort style accommodation squeezing out the more affordable caravan hire opportunities. Caravan parks are an important transition housing option and also a permanent residence for low income families and singles.

2006

The vacancy rate for rental housing in Mackay has remained below 1% all year with massive rental increases continuing. The influx of workers in the mining and construction industry on above-average wages has fuelled the rental increases. Increasing house prices has also contributed.

With no sign that the trend has stabilized we can only look forward to further increases in rent. There is currently a negative rental vacancy rate in the area.

The lack of affordable housing is now affecting the ability to gain and retain workers in the area. Large companies are offering above market rents to secure housing for their workers.

Some have bought motel complexes to ensure incoming workers have accommodation. Some of the lower paid sectors are struggling to find workers to employ because low paid workers cannot afford housing. Employers are also struggling with workers being trained and then taking their skills into higher paid job options.

Single income people were unable to afford rents earlier in the year with single income families struggling by the end of the year. Many of the Centrelink dependent pensioners have found they have had to leave town or move into share arrangements as the rents increase beyond their budgets.

By the end of the year single income families were in a similar position. It is more difficult to share house with a family and the rental agencies are beginning to breach tenants who have more people living at their house than the lease allows.

The social housing system is working to capacity with long wait lists for lower income families caught out of the market. The Department of Housing wait lists continue to grow. There has been no significant response for the social housing sector to address the growing need for affordable housing.

The introduction of the One Social Housing System will provide a system to address those in most need for the time they are in need but will be unable to meet the housing shortage of those who just need affordable accommodation.

Caravan parks in the area have continued to upgrade into tourist villa style units and have moved away from affordable hire vans. All have high occupancy rates, making it difficult to find accommodation in the affordable realm. Many new comers to town find themselves staying for long periods of time in expensive holiday letting housing within caravan parks or in motels.

2007

The vacancy rate for rental housing in Mackay has remained below 1% all year but the rents have not seen the huge increases of last year. There are still rises in the lower end of the market but it has been slower in the more expensive larger houses.

The price of house sales has slowed over the last year. The cost of renting at the higher end of the market is now close to the cost of paying a mortgage when buying a new house and land package at the bottom of the market.

The price of buying houses has stabilised but is still high. Out in the hinterland mining towns there are many vacant houses. New workers to town are not prepared to pay the higher prices for rentals or purchase but the market is not producing falling rents.

Most workers choose to live in the extended single person’s quarters during work time and return to their families on off days. They commute on supplied buses to Mackay or Rockhampton or even fly in and out of Brisbane.

Employers in a number of fields are offering rent subsidies to gain and retain workers. This practice has extended from the mining industry to the support industry and even the lower income industries like hospitality and cleaners.

There is a strong share accommodation market in Mackay as workers link together to access nicer rental properties and provide security for one another as they are away at work for days at a time. These can be shared tenancy arrangements or private board arrangements.

This year has seen more single income working and Centrelink income families unable to access affordable housing on the rental market. The emergency housing providers have felt the strain of having to evict families back to the streets.

For those families that have to stay in Mackay for Family Court matters involving access to children, this is particularly difficult.

The caravan parks are providing less affordable housing as they can rent cabins and caravans to well paid workers for excessive rents. We have seen increasing prices for boarding houses with the sale of one large boarding house bought to house building company workers and displacing a number of Centrelink pensioners currently living there.

Out of sheer frustration at the number of people not being able to secure rental housing, I did some research into the amount of income needed for housing in Mackay and found that only households earning $39,000 net a year could afford an average two bedroom flat.

For a three bedroom house you will need a net income of $55,000. These figures are based on the real estate’s rule of thumb, possible because of high demand, that tenants are only approved for housing where they pay less than a third of their income for rent.
This means all Centrelink families and low income workers will need social housing, share housing or need to move town when their current tenancy ends. Only families on high income or double income can afford to live here. (See figure 1)

The Department of Housing has responded to the rising crisis for low income tenants in Mackay by buying three motel complexes and converting them into studio units. This has been good for some single people squeezed out of the private market.

The Department has also bought a number of duplexes thus securing them for low income families. New growth in the private market is only providing expensive, new units in complexes and high rises.

Caravan parks in the area have continued to upgrade into tourist villa style units and have moved away from affordable hire vans. It is now necessary to put your name on a waiting list for a vacancy in some parks.

2008

The lack of enough emergency options has seen an increase in the number of families living in makeshift housing and sleeping rough. Mackay is a mixture of unsupported new arrivals and established farming families. Those with extended families and social networks cope much better when homelessness faces them.

Unfortunately the large mining industry attracts unsupported families that are able to cope well while mining wages fund them but for the unemployed and for those whose income has been cut, the cost of housing/living in Mackay is very expensive.

We need more emergency housing options to give a period of time for families to re-establish themselves when facing homelessness.

This year has seen the start of high rise apartment living in the city. This year there are at least five under construction around town. This will add a new dimension to housing options in Mackay. They are providing some 1–3 bedroom apartments at the top end of the rental market.

This year also saw the closure of two caravan parks in the region — closed for redevelopment into residential plots. There is a trend towards caravan parks to be more focused on the tourist trade with only limited long term options. The villas or dongas are being rented at tourist prices even for the longer term tenants.

2009

The vacancy rate for rental housing in Mackay has steadily risen during the year from 1–3%. There has been a downturn in employment in the mining sector. This is good news for tenants.

Tenants have a selection of properties to apply for when changing tenancies. It has also put pressure on the real estate’s to address maintenance issues in a timelier manner. Many tenants hired housing of a better standard rather than continuing to live with poor repairs that were forced on them over the last few years. It has also made it easier to take action when their rights have been denied or ignored.

The bottom end of the market is still outside the reach of single income families and those of Centrelink payments. The big vacancies are in the top end of the market previously housing the mining workers community.

It was pleasing to see that housing got a huge increase in funding as part of the stimulation of the economy and jobs. There is new housing being built under the federal housing package, increases in state housing and partnerships with developers for affordable housing.

At the start of the boom it was possible to find some sort of housing for most tenants.

The biggest hurdles were bad references but as the vacancy rate fell and rents increased affordability became a major player. The first to be pushed out of the market were large families who could not afford the rents for the number of bedrooms they required and the single person Centrelink recipients who could not afford the rent on their income.

The more affordable options of cheap flats, boarding houses and caravan parks were seen as good options for high paid contract workers who were on fixed contracts and only in town for two to three days a week.

As the boom continued to force market rents up, single income people and Centrelink families were also forced out of the rental market.

During the boom it was impossible for those on incomes less than $1000 a week to rent even a two bedroom unit. The next to go were the low income people and families. At the top of the boom single income families could not come or stay in town to take up positions in service industries like teachers, police force, welfare agencies etc because their incomes were too low. For example, in Moranbah where the rents were even higher, all the butchers were forced out of town and meat had to be bought in.

When workers were no longer able to afford housing in the area the government became interested in the problem. The large employers and local council were struggling to attract and keep workers. Some employers bought rooms in motels or had to supply housing just to keep their businesses running.

Those tenants established in tenancies before the boom had to ride out the huge increases in rent because there were no options to be rehoused into. They often had to put up with little or no repairs during this period. While the real estate agencies would only houses tenants where less than a third of their income was spent on rent, this did not apply to continued increased once the tenancy was established. For some tenants the increase gradually overtook their income so some had to move out while some took in boarders to pay the rent.

Another factor in Mackay is that there are many cheap suburbs on the outskirts. Even the farm cottages in the Pioneer Valley and Sarina reached unaffordable heights. While Rockhampton rents were considerably less than Mackay they are 330 km away. The rents in Airlie Beach to the north were also just as high.

A culture developed where lessor could refuse to do repairs because they knew the tenants were unlikely to move out because there was nowhere to go. Some did move out into homelessness.

As the vacancy rates went back up and more housing was available on the private markets, the full extent of the poor housing tenants had endured became apparent. To complain or ask for repairs in a very tight rental market generally resulted in termination without grounds, even with rent increases.

The social housing system was slow to respond to the crisis with increases in supply. We did eventually get some motel room social housing accommodation.

The stimulus packages will produce increases in housing stock which is most welcome. The bond loan scheme became redundant when the income required to secure housing overtook the income limit for eligibility for assistance.

By now the emergency housing and social housing options were blocked with no exit points. The crisis housing stock was not increased and this put great pressure on the providers to decide who to evict into homelessness to give another client a chance to stabilise. Those in crisis who could move to another town did not have the finances to do so.

As the housing demand eases the rents at the top of the market have dropped from $630 to $450 while the rentals below $250 are still very hard to find. Many people have left town to more affordable living and are unlikely to return, breaking connections with family and networks.

The town remains a place where low and lower middle income earners struggle to get affordable housing.

The private rental market is very dependent on demand to set the cost of rents. High rents are not the only effect of high demand. Homelessness is also an outcome for a significant number of locals.

Lack of repairs and an increasing imbalance of power between the tenant and housing providers creates its own cultural effect.

While a number of makeshift remedies can be put in place for the short time, such as sharing and supplying employer housing, they are not sustainable solutions. Our experience in Mackay of riding through a boom suggests that boom means prosperity for some and leads to homelessness for others.
Supporting Homeless Families:
Housing, Education, Training and Employment

By Maureen O'Regan,
Kylie Robertson
and Alison Thorburn,
Micah Projects

In 2008 Micah Projects undertook a National Homelessness Strategy Demonstration Project that demonstrated how focussed family support services can end homelessness for very vulnerable families. To achieve this outcome practitioners targeted their interventions to support families to:

• Meet their tenancy obligations, including paying rent;
• Maintain a safe and healthy living environment;
• Create a home;
• Relate to neighbours in a respectful manner, and
• Maintain safe and protective functioning family unit.

Micah Projects has continued to improve and expand its focus on achieving housing stability for homeless families. The next step for those families who are housed and supported yet still vulnerable is targeted activity that promotes social inclusion. This work requires a collaborative effort with families, family support workers and a new team of specialist employment workers.

The Participate in Prosperity, or Micah Projects PIP for Jobless Families Team (PIP), undertakes focussed work with the parents in jobless households in relation to their aspirations for education, training and employment. This involves work with people who have experienced significant disadvantage since childhood and for whom our systems of education and training have failed to properly recruit, engage and address their specific learning needs. These are people whose unemployment is further compounded by their social isolation, histories of addiction, poor mental or physical health and disability.

Micah Projects PIP team is the outcome of a successful tender with the Participate in Prosperity (PIP) program within the Queensland Government’s Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation. Micah Projects PIP for Jobless Families program directly addresses the State Government’s Toward Q2 vision to halve the number of children living in jobless households by the year 2020.

The PIP team works within the Micah Projects Family, Women and Children Support Services. This enables them to work collaboratively with family support and advocacy workers across the services which include Young Mothers for Yong Women team (parents under 25), Homeless Prevent (prevention of homelessness service) and Families to Home (long term homeless families). PIP is a small team of four employment support and advocacy workers, including a part time peer support worker.

The team’s focus on education, employment and training has enabled family support and advocacy workers to link parents with PIP employment support and advocacy workers. The PIP workers and family support workers work collaboratively with these families.

During the 12 month pilot for the program, the PIP team worked with 47 parents or carers from families being supported by Micah Projects. At the conclusion of this first year, 25 of these participants had engaged with training or education; seven had secured full time work and three were in part time or casual work.

The Queensland Government’s Participate in Prosperity program compliments and provides the additional support that the most disadvantaged families require to engage with the Australian Government Jobs Services Australia.

Integrating Service Delivery:
Supporting Aspirations:
Overcoming Barriers

Once a family is housed and receiving ongoing support to maintain their tenancy, an opportunity exists to ask: ‘What next? Have you thought about going into training — or going back to school?’ These questions are often beyond the scope and resources of family support activity with families at risk of homelessness.

They are questions that directly address potential ways of alleviating poverty and facilitating social inclusion and they must be explored with a strong understanding of the barriers for vulnerable parents and the support they need to overcome these barriers.

Without exception these parents have had unsatisfactory experiences in educational and training environments, particularly at secondary school. The younger parents often feel judged by staff in schools or colleges. Many of Micah Projects’ participants have only reached Year 9 and are very hesitant to return to a classroom environment.

Overall they have a very limited experience of success and a real fear of failure. Many have underdeveloped literacy and numeracy skills and have experienced cultural alienation in mainstream learning environments.
Once they are engaged in activity to achieve their aspirations to learn or to work, their PIP Support and Advocacy Worker will begin, step by step, to assist them to realise their goal. For example, these families need access to affordable child care when they are accepted into a work placement or training program.

They may need support to negotiate a place for their child or children or some reassurance that they are not being judged by child care staff. PIP workers can provide advocacy if they struggle to assert their rights or communicate their needs and, at times, PIP can provide direct assistance with bonds and fees.

PIP workers will also provide direct practical assistance to enable participation. For example, PIP workers can source and set up donated computers, assist with transport or provide personal support at initial meetings in new and unfamiliar social settings.

The work involves a sensitive and respectful delivery of both practical and personal support to empower participants to build social confidence and overcome their fears or frustrations and take the specific steps to realise their aspirations.

**Working with Mainstream Employment Services**

The employment casework undertaken by the PIP team is also focussed on assisting participants to understand the Centrelink system, the difference between Centrelink and the Job Services Australia (JSA) providers and the opportunities and resources available to them through both agencies.

The employment caseworkers actively encourage participants to fulfil their reporting requirements and support them to negotiate individual payments. This role is complimentary to the JSA. Rather than duplicating the work of the JSA the PIP worker plays a critical role in facilitating the participant’s access to their entitlements and the resources of the employment network.

**Collaborative Practice**

Given the vulnerabilities of these families and their history of disadvantage there will be times when they experience a crisis that can slow down or temporarily suspend activity to achieve their employment or training goals. In these instances a flexible collaborative approach with the family support workers enables an intensive response to the crisis while the employment work is put on the back burner until the crisis is over.

To achieve effective collaboration PIP support and advocacy workers and family support workers have ensured that:

- Parents have consented for their support plans to be shared across the teams; or joint support plans are developed between the parent/s, their Micah Projects family support worker and their PIP worker;
- There is clear and regular formal and informal communication to avoid the duplication of general support activity and to streamline responsiveness. For example, an employment support and advocacy worker visiting a family to assist with the creation of a resume can also deliver a food voucher provided by the family support and advocacy worker;
- Workers undertake joint family visits and clarify their respective roles with families in relation to a holistic support plan;
- Employment support and advocacy workers explore a parent’s aspirations and support focussed activity to achieve their employment and training goals;
- Monthly meetings occur between the teams to review casework plans and progress in relation to the specific goals in specific domains, and
- Family support workers and PIP employment support and advocacy workers participate together in monthly professional practice reflection and supervision.

**Policy and Program Development Implications**

From a policy perspective it is critical to recognise that homelessness is caused by a multiplicity of factors that cannot be simply attributed to the functioning of individuals or families. Whilst each person has their own particular challenges that require attention there are significant systemic barriers to securing stable housing and engaging in education, training and employment.

Micah Projects’ recent innovation builds on the work to stabilise housing for homeless families. Once some stability is achieved and ongoing support is established, families now have the opportunity to go further in relation to activity that promotes their social inclusion and their ability to support their family.

This work can occur alongside more general family support which requires continued focus in dealing with the personal barriers such as health issues or dealing with the barriers which exist due to the historic or current presence of domestic violence and providing the basic support in responding to the needs of the whole family.

It needs to occur at the families pace in a flexible and integrated way such that both stable housing outcomes, safe family functioning and education, employment and training outcomes can be achieved.

**Footnote**

1. Micah Projects refer to workers who directly provide support and assistance to homeless families as Support and Advocacy Workers. The Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation Participation in Prosperity (PIP) program refers to workers employed under the PIP grant program as Employment Case Managers.
Up for Rent Program at the Women’s Centre, Townsville

By Cathy Crawford, Coordinator, the Women’s Centre

The Women’s Centre

The Women’s Centre is a not-for-profit organisation that provides free counseling, 24-hour telephone support, drop in services, social and therapeutic groups and regular physical activities. It is Townsville’s Sexual Assault Service and a women’s health funded service as well as a homelessness funded service.

The Women’s Centre had 23,486 contacts for the year 2009 – 2010. On average 77 women and children visit the centre on any working day. Five hundred presentations of homelessness were made to the crisis counselling service.

Background of Program

Homeless and complex needs funding targeted elsewhere by the Department of Communities was offered as one off monies to the Women’s Centre in 2007. The development of the Up for Rent program began as a result of this funding. For the Women’s Centre the program seemed a very logical progression for women who had crisis accommodation but needed to seek permanent accommodation.

The supply of accommodation was very short and the cost very high and homelessness for women was significant. The money was granted a second time but was not recurring and the program folded at a critical time in its development.

However, a brokerage agreement to provide services to clients identified under the Homeless and Complex Needs Money was entered into with Red Cross Heading Home Program.

This resulted in the Up for Rent program re-establishing itself again and from August 2008 to June 2010 the program developed into a significant community program with specific activities and outcomes being monitored.

Program Model

The Up for Rent Program was designed to assist women find and access rental accommodation. It was originally designed to be both a group and individual program to meet individual women’s needs for homes. However, as it evolved it became more individually focused.

Women’s crisis accommodation needs were supposed to have been addressed prior to program entry.

The program was flexible and responsive to women’s needs. There were no criteria for entry to program apart from homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

The Aim of the program was:

1. To decrease homelessness and the risk of homelessness by assisting women to secure rental accommodation;
2. To empower women by developing skills to secure suitable rental accommodation, through a supported environment that provides relevant information and assistance in all requirements of applying, securing and sustaining rental properties, and
3. To work with women to decrease the barriers to securing safe, affordable long-term accommodation.

The Objectives were:

• To provide information necessary to apply for rental accommodation public and private;
• To develop knowledge of rights and responsibilities of tenants;
• To develop skills needed to complete necessary forms or applications;
• To familiarise women with local rental agencies and their procedures;
• To assist in the development of personal budgets to ensure appropriate rental properties are applied for and easily maintained;
• To create awareness of Rental Bond Authority;
• To raise awareness of obligations of tenants;
• To develop skills that can be used without assistance by the individual when having any involvement in the rental process;
• To introduce women to other services provided by this organisation;
• To provide transport when required, and
• To provide some financial support to women in the rental seeking process.

Program Activity

The program was run by different workers on different days ensuring flexibility and a speedy follow-up service. The referrals to the accommodation project were made from within this organisation, self-referrals and outside agencies both government and non-government. A significant number of referrals came from Queensland Housing and Centrelink.

Women were transported by the Women’s Centre staff to look at properties; the Women’s Centre paid the key deposit to see the property. Women often travelled together and supported each other when looking at accommodation.

The workers worked with women to enable them to identify their needs and be realistic about the options for housing that were available including doing a budget. The worker also supported women through the use of the internet in locating homes.

Workers actively sought to remove barriers to secure accommodation with women. The worker would assess the level of involvement and supports required by a woman and then target the intervention to those needs.

The program was about empowering women by rescuing them appropriately. This included going to interviews with women, filling out forms, flexibly using emergency relief funds.

If women did not return to the program they were re-contacted (many times if necessary) to see if they had found suitable accommodation. If they had not found accommodation then workers worked with then to reengage with the program.

Most women reengaged at that point. This follow up was based on the belief that most of the women had engaged at times when crisis accommodation had just been found and that the crisis of homelessness was still foremost.

However, once the immediate crisis is over often women do not remain engaged in programs that facilitate medium or long term change in their lives. This appears to be often due to the ongoing day to day survival pressures women face when they have a lack of resources and are in financial hardship.

Re-engagement meant that women had an increased chance in securing more long-term accommodation before their short-term option ceased.

Most significantly, workers developed relationships with Real Estate Agents that enabled and facilitated better negotiations on behalf of women. Workers worked closely with other agencies including homelessness services, financial services, tenancy services and legal services.
Issues

Women-centred issues include:
- Discrimination against women based on ethnicity and finances;
- Real estate agents not accepting bond loans;
- Significant issues exist for women seeking accommodation with children with disabilities;
- Transport is an ongoing issue for women to find accommodation and maintain it, and
- TICA listing narrowed the opportunity to rent only in the private rental market with a private landlord.

Organisational issues include:
- This program has suffered from the impact of poor funding planning and non-reoccurring funding;
- The program growth and relationships established with real estate agents and referral agencies was significant however, with disestablishment of the program credibility is affected and ultimately services to the homeless women, and
- There is also significant cost to the organisation such as the coming and going of workers and the financial costs for re-advertising, orientating staff and administration if funding is uncertain.

What was achieved?

From August 2008 to June 2010:
- 350 women engaged with the program;
- 757 occasions of service were had;
- 159 women secured accommodation i.e. 30.5%;
- 45.4% of women seeking accommodation identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and 15% of those women were housed, and
- 4.5% women identified as culturally and linguistically diverse and 3.7% were housed.

This work was done in an environment where the supply of accommodation was very short and the cost very high. Taking this into consideration housing 30% of the women on the program indicates the program was an overwhelming success.

Other outcomes included:
- Increased awareness of what is required to apply for rental accommodation;
- Removal of women from the TIKA list;
- Development of autonomous skills in the rental accommodation process that can be utilised at any given time;
- Applications for Domestic Violence Orders;
- Engagement in other programs including ongoing counselling and therapeutic groups;
- Identification and medical documents secured;
- Children returned from Child Safety or the reunification process beginning;
- Decrease in social isolation and cost sharing of accommodation due to relationships between women developing;
- Children have been enrolled in school that were not in schools, and
- Development of internet and general computer skills

This program’s success was based on several significant factors including:
- The ongoing follow up of women with repetitive re-engagement;
- No barriers practice meaning that if an issue arose the worker worked with the woman to address it and ensured follow through and accessibility to services particularly mainstream;
- This program provided diverse responses in keeping with the multitude of experiences women had had, and
- No criteria to the service and program except a woman over the age of 15 years seeking accommodation

Conclusion

The Women’s Centre was a very logical location as an entry point to an accommodation program. The support to engage women and maintain the persistence required to achieve secure accommodation was the base to a successful program.

The establishment of positive and constructive relationships with relevant agencies and real estate agents provided a great base to work from with the homeless women and children. An acknowledgement needs to go to the workers that developed the relationships and maintained a ‘no barrier’ will be too great attitude throughout.

Thank you Rosa, Nyree, Jemma, Anna, Sandra and Annica.
From Drawing Board to Boardroom: Interview with Eloise Atkinson

Eloise Atkinson is a registered architect, a Director of Deicke Richards and a Director on the Brisbane Housing Company Board. She has over 15 years of experience with affordable housing projects. Parity spoke to her about her role in affordable housing and the part it can play in dealing with homelessness in inner Brisbane.

Parity: What sparked your interest in affordable housing? When was that?

Eloise: As a student at The University of Queensland, I took a course, ‘Housing, People and Places’, taught by Dr Greg Bamford. The course looked at how architecture can address social issues and the psychological effects of environments. This course, and Greg’s teaching generally, were a big influence on me.

I then went to work with Peter Richards and John Deicke and became their first employee when they started the Deicke Richards practice in 1994. We worked with community housing groups and I found it exciting to meet tenants in ‘Client Workshops’ where we discussed designs to meet the needs of households on low incomes. You know, a sixteen-year-old from Woodridge could be quick to point out what would work and what wouldn’t. Many of the tenants were very articulate and had a good idea of what they wanted from a dwelling. And they were realistic, not asking for anything outlandish.

At that stage of my life I’d lived in maybe five different houses. Some of our tenants had lived in 25! Sometimes this confronted ideas about ‘the transition between the interior and exterior of the house’, and other academic notions. I learned how important it was for community housing tenants to have access to support, helping them establish stable tenancies.

Parity: You took a Churchill Fellowship to study affordable housing. What did you do? What did you find particularly interesting?

Eloise: I was awarded the Fellowship in 2006 and in 2007 I went to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. I had a few side trips but the main places I visited were San Francisco, New York, Toronto, Montreal, London and Manchester. I knew interesting things were happening elsewhere, the cooperative housing movement in the Scandinavian countries for example, but I wanted to focus on countries which had a comparable housing culture to our own, similar home ownership aspirations, attitudes to renting, ideas about the role of the state and so on.

I was particularly interested in examples of mixed tenure housing developments which we did not have much experience of in Queensland. BHC is doing some of these now, but I found developments such as Adelaide Wharf in London which emphasised mixed tenure outcomes. These were new models and I knew we could learn from them. The architecture was interesting, so was the project process—the way different stakeholders were engaged to deliver the projects.

Parity: Do your fellow architects understand affordable housing issues well? Is there a particular contribution architects as a profession can make?

Eloise: I think as an architect there are ways of working that I’ve learned, and that other architects practice too, which can make a valuable contribution. The close consultation with tenants in design workshops for community housing projects taught me to be sensitive to the needs of residents and users of buildings, not just to the client’s or developer’s needs. Architects can take on an advocacy role, too, when they are interpreting tenants’ needs as design ideas. This is particularly important when dealing with projects for tenants who are not always consulted about their needs, and who may not be used to being consulted.

Parity: How did you react when asked to join the BHC Board?

Eloise: I was excited by the opportunity to put my practical experience in designing for community housing clients together with the developer role that BHC has, in a policy context. I’d learned a lot from working on the Jeays Street project at Bowen Hills, which was begun by the Department of Housing and became the first property in BHC’s portfolio. This was one of the first projects to move away from the public housing one-size-fits-all approach: at Jeays Street, which had some interesting architectural challenges, a range of dwelling types and sizes is available, to meet the needs of different tenants. The Company maintains this approach to all its projects.

Parity: How do you like working with the Board? Do you feel you have a particular contribution to make?

Eloise: I love it. I’d been on various committees before but this is my first role as a director at this level. I succeeded the late Dr Paula Whitman on the Board. Paula was a friend and mentor and hers has been a hard act to follow. We have a great chair, John McAuliffe, who works ceaselessly, a great CEO in David Cant and the staff are all dedicated and hard working. The Board takes its role very seriously. Everyone is committed and every member is there for a reason. There’s a good spread of expertise and each of us is expected to contribute to decision-making.

At first I was taken aback when a set of plans was rolled out and everyone looked to me for comment. I’m not there to change designs but to help the Board understand what it is they are being asked to approve, and to help ensure value for money and good client outcomes in a project. We make real decisions that have real consequences for people’s lives and for their housing needs.

Now, as a member of the Board, I don’t do paid work for the Company, to avoid conflicts of interest. So I can be independent about the advice I offer.
Parity: BHC’s aim is to deliver housing solutions to people in need. Do you get to meet tenants and see the difference a secure, affordable tenancy makes in their lives?

Eloise: As Chair of the Board’s Tenancy Committee, I do get a good understanding of our tenants and learn something of what a difference secure, affordable housing makes.

I think too about groups like Second Chance, which provides targeted assistance to homeless women in Brisbane, topping up rents in BHC properties to ensure they don’t slip back into homelessness. I’ve seen people move from boarding house rooms to studio apartments to something larger, and along the way they’ve been able to stabilise their lives and secure employment and gain some independence.

I’ve also learned how important it is that at grass roots level, people get one-on-one support and contact that builds trust between them and the Housing Company, the case worker, and perhaps eventually an employer. The same thing is happening with the Under One Roof project in Brisbane. That’s how the best results are achieved.

In San Francisco, a city with a very high rate of homelessness, I saw housing projects that are required to accommodate a variety of income groups, including the poorest of people literally taken off the streets. They are given permanent housing and case workers and other forms of support. We need more mixed-tenure and mixed-income models like this to meet the range of needs we see in Brisbane today. BHC has a role to play in delivering housing along these lines and I’m pleased to be part of this.

Parity: Increased support for affordable housing has flowed from Commonwealth Government funding programs. Do you see these programs making a difference over time?

Eloise: I think there’s already been an impact. Certainly we are seeing some of the need for affordable housing addressed through these programs. There’s another shift I’ve noticed, maybe linked to the economic downturn. Because work is available for social and affordable housing projects at a rate not seen for more than a decade, architects and developers who haven’t previously been involved in affordable housing projects are coming onto the scene. The benefits are multiple. New ideas are brought into design discussions, and new people learn the demands and challenges of design for the needs of lower-income tenants.

Parity: Is there a ‘women’s angle’ to your role, a broader ‘social justice’ motivation or some other philosophical outlook?

Eloise: I participate in the Australian Institute of Architects Women’s group and am a member of the Urban Development Institute of Australia’s Women in Development group, which allows me to engage with industry in a congenial way, but my motivation since my student days is more a broad social justice orientation than a specific women’s perspective. I experience a frustration, a wonder that with so much wealth in the City of Brisbane, we cannot house people affordably.

Having said that, I don’t want to be seen as “an architect with a social conscience”, as if that is something unusual. I think the profession is rising to the occasion, meeting the challenges of delivering affordability along with good building design and good urban design. After all meeting these challenges is everyone’s business, and architects can’t do it alone. Working with Brisbane Housing Company has allowed me to see close up how different disciplines, different professions can work together effectively to deliver the outcomes we all want.

Parity: As a BHC Director, how do you see affordable housing contributing to meeting the needs of homeless people in Brisbane?

Eloise: As I see it, affordable housing isn’t the only solution to homelessness, and not all affordable housing is suitable for homeless people. BHC sets rents at a discount to the market rents for similar dwellings, so some of this stock may not be affordable to people on very low incomes. But the Company tries to ensure that a significant proportion of our portfolio—the boarding rooms and smaller studios—are affordable at no more than 30% of income to people on very low incomes, such as a Newstart Allowance. If you look at our properties in Warry Street, Lake Street, Jeas Street and others, we meet this objective. They make up close to 20% of our portfolio.

BHC keeps track of tenant movements within our properties. We see clear evidence of people becoming tenants at the “bottom rung,” say in a boarding room, and moving up into self-contained accommodation, as I mentioned before. Support groups like Second Chance can help people doing this. In our view, this combination of affordable housing and targeted support is the best way to ensure people don’t recycle back into homelessness. And with well-located properties, we’re providing accommodation close to services and to employment opportunities.

We also know some households on higher incomes were at risk of homelessness at the point we made them an offer. When people have to deal with divorce, bereavement, mental health issues and so on, they can lose their home. Suddenly they are exposed to stress and uncertainty, and an affordable rental option gives them a safety net while they deal with those larger personal issues.
A Local Government Response to Housing Need in the Community: The Gold Coast

By Ms. Kerrie Young, Chairman, Gold Coast Housing Company, Director of Property Development Consulting Firm, Kerrie Young Property Pty Ltd

The Gold Coast Housing Company (GCHC) has a central mission to alleviate poverty by way of providing appropriate and affordable housing to the communities in which we operate. This article is intended to inform the reader of how GCHC is achieving this aim in an environment of a widespread downturn in the economy, increasing unemployment and the apparent inability of private industry to meet the demand for housing in our communities.

To illustrate this I will digress a little and provide a history to how partnering with the Gold Coast City Council in a number of their projects and initiatives led to my own involvement with the Gold Coast (Horizon) Housing Company and offer a few insights into the homelessness and housing stress experienced in Gold Coast. I have written this in the hope that it may give other local authorities and our elected representatives a framework and pathway so they might facilitate and replicate the work being undertaken by GCHC and other community housing providers across the country.

1991

I first became aware of the homeless on the Gold Coast while contracting as the Divisional Manager for the Australian Bureau of Statistics during the Census 1991. At the time I was responsible for overseeing the distribution of Census forms by some 300 collectors in the southern Gold Coast. The Census collectors were regularly phoning me to ask what they should do with the Census form for the ‘fellow they just saw camping out under the bridge’ or the ‘lady living in the Park’.

While I had lived on the Gold Coast for some ten years and worked professionally in Economics and Advisory field in the property development industry busily assisting in creating new subdivisions, apartment buildings, commercial/retail and tourism developments; I had not until that time been aware of the homeless in our community. I was troubled that these people had been so invisible in a city that was apparently ‘booming’. How could these people be left behind and left out of the prosperity enjoyed by others? OK, so I was aware of it but what could be done about it?

I had taken leave of absence from my job as research assistant with the fledgling Gold Coast City and Albert Shires joint “Regional Economic Development Committee” to work with the ABS on the Census 1991. The REDC’s aim was to encourage new industry to relocate to the Gold Coast.

The rising population needed new jobs to be created to support them. The City’s leaders saw that an over reliance on tourism and construction would not lead to long term prosperity. We needed a more diverse economic base and higher paying jobs; the beginnings of an Information Technology industry and the first Gold Coast University, Bond University were being established.
In 2010 the amalgamated Gold Coast City Council has expanded this initiative into “Business GC” the Economic development Branch with a multi million dollar budget and many successes in job creation, export of local goods, higher education and marine industries and other sectors. Despite this the Gold Coast still has one of the lowest average household incomes in the State, I dread to think what would have happened without the foresight of the Gold Coast and Albert Shires in being proactive in economic development some 20 years ago.

In 1991 the city was feeling the effects of an economic downturn which rivals that which we are experiencing now in 2009/10. The property market plummeted. Homelessness and housing stress was then and is now a serious problem with unemployment rising in tourism and construction industries, businesses closing down and families exhausting their savings and selling assets to keep going.

Construction of new homes declined to levels below the number required even to house new people moving to the region, which in a cruel twist, drives the price of scarce rental housing UP! This forces more people on to the streets or into inappropriate housing. Families break down and youth bear the brunt of discord at home, even if they make it through their education there is little work for them when they enter the job market. On top of this the city has had the highest population growth rate in the country averaging around 2.6% and 15,000 people per year, every year for the past 30 years... the pressure on the housing market is relentless.

The Gold Coast City Council began placing more emphasis on collecting information to support the Strategic planning for the fast growing City.

2005-2007

In 2005 I was asked to join a steering committee for the Gold Coast City Council “Housing Strategy” which eventually in 2006 published a very important document “Housing for All of Us – Housing Needs Assessment” which profiled the population of the Gold Coast and sought to quantify the numbers and type of appropriate housing we would need into the future. I was one of the property industry representatives within a group made up of community representatives and support agencies bought together by Council officers to advise on the housing needs and provision for the City’s residents.

The communication between members of that Steering Group, those who dealt with the ‘need’ at the coalface and those who built the housing stock led to a far better understanding of the problems we faced as a community and highlighted the mismatch between what was being built and what was really required.

I felt that the development industry was, at least within that representative group, seen to be the source of the homelessness and housing problem. The perception was that ‘Greedy’ developers had caused housing stress and homelessness by raising the prices of homes to make ‘fat’ profits at the expense of the residents. While I didn’t attempt to defend all the members of my industry we were able to find some common ground and a mutual understanding of how the property market worked and what costs and charges were factored in to the eventual price of a property on the market for sale or rent.

As President of the UDIA Gold Coast branch I knew that it was in truth a time when developers’ profits were being eroded by petrol and food prices, lengthy development approval times and infrastructure charges. The development industries challenge was to keep prices in the range that purchasers could still afford or go broke themselves. An economic squeeze and market downturn was on its way... again.

“Housing Affordability” is a concept that is talked about widely now and it is a complicated issue, but simply put it becomes a problem when the cost of housing is out of the financial reach of those who require it. Enough said. The GCCC Housing Strategy Group adopted the State governments’ definition that people in the lowest 40% of income brackets who were paying out more than 30% of the household income on housing were experiencing “Housing Stress”.

Whilst a good place to start this definition doesn’t take into account the effect of rising petrol and food prices, Kiddo charges, childcare and education which undermine peoples ability to raise deposits and service loans or rent payments. It doesn’t identify poverty in our communities.

At the Census 2006 of the City’s stressed working households, 63% earned $600 per week or less. So at 30% of income affordability housing would be no more than $180 per week, yet median rent for a two bedroom home was $260 per week and a three bedroom home was $320 per week.

On the Gold Coast at these rental rates people on average weekly incomes of over $1,000 per week were still experiencing housing stress. Professional people, nurses, teachers, fireman, blue collar workers were all in the same boat and very unlikely to be able to save for a deposit on their own home.

In 2007 Griffith University’s Director of Urban Research, Brendon Gleeson said that ‘more than 22,500 people on the Gold Coast were living under severe housing stress’. I think he underestimated the figure. At the same time I was told over 9,000 people had gone to the trouble of registering on the Public Housing waiting list.

Then Deputy Mayor David Power quoting the GCCC Housing Need Assessment said, ‘the city had the lowest rate of housing affordability for working households outside of Sydney City, North Shore and Eastern suburbs. The trend is emerging, as in the U.S. of a class of working poor who essentially earn a subsistence wage barely covering rent or food.” He was right, and if the working poor were in trouble what chance did those on government benefits have?

The GCCC Housing Needs study found Gold Coast residents were on lower incomes compared to other regions in Queensland. This was due in part to the prevalence of people on unemployment or other benefits, part-time jobs in the retail service sector and tourism and hospitality industries paying lower wages than other sectors of the economy. At the same time land and housing costs were among the highest in the country.

More importantly for the community housing sector the report also highlighted the low rate of provision of social housing in the City in comparison to the statistically quantified need. The public sector and the private housing industry were in this together.

Dignity in Housing:
Pathways from Homelessness to Home Ownership

2006 Formation of the Gold Coast Housing Company

Part way through the delivery of the Housing Needs Assessment report, the Gold Coast City Council and the predecessor of the Department of Communities became stakeholders in the establishment of a Not For Profit Community Housing provider on the Gold Coast. Once again I joined a steering committee formed to guide the amalgamation of two long standing and respected community housing groups, Gold Coast Vision Housing Limited and Gold Coast Community Housing Inc.

The steering committee led by Rebecca Oelkers consulted widely with support agencies and community groups and a number of these became founding shareholders along with UDIA and a number of private companies operating in the Gold Coast development industry. We were able to consult with other established housing providers and in particular the successful Brisbane Housing Company in creating our model.

The GCCC was forthcoming with $3M over three years subject to project milestones with the funds to go towards developments that supported affordable housing for low income working residents close to public transport and employment opportunities.

The GCCHC has benefited from the close involvement and support of the GCCC and Department of Communities since our inception. In 2007 the then Deputy Mayor spoke of GCCC considering an incentive based model that encouraged developers to provide an affordable component within selected developments. This hasn’t been implemented however some major projects have paid significant amounts towards Affordable housing contributions which have been passed on to GCCHC and our $3M capital grant funding agreement.
The State Government pledged at the time $15M capital grant for the development of social housing projects in the City to increase the supply and assist with the critical shortage of public housing stock.

The GCHC mission is to alleviate poverty by way of providing appropriate and affordable housing to the communities in which we operate.

Anecdotally we know that some people are paying 50 or 60% of their income in rent, for many people the Australian dream of home ownership will never be a reality, for many others calling a rental property home is not sustainable. Housing costs are forcing people over the poverty line. In 2007 the GCHC founding Chairman and St Vincent De Paul CEO Peter Maher said, ‘on the Gold Coast the situation is very, very serious. In excess of a 100 people, including families, are sleeping in cars and places like that because they can’t get affordable housing. It is an alarming issue.’

The Vision: The GCHC saw a pathway was possible using State Government funds to build more social housing and assist in getting the Homeless into appropriate accommodation, co-ordinating with our network of support agencies ideally to assist these people up the housing chain into subsidised rental housing. GCHC delivered subsidised ‘shared equity’ housing for purchase and on to eventually home ownership.

The NFP Gold Coast Housing Company was established in 2007 with a skills based Board of nine directors. In an innovative and strategic approach the GCHC charter enabled the company to tenancy manage the initial stock of 220 units of accommodation on behalf of the State Government and to participate in Property development opportunities in its own right or by way of joint venture opportunities to create socially representative cohesive mixed communities. GCHC saw for example their future involvement in a master planned development that could contain open market purchase, market rental, subsidised purchase and subsidised rental properties. Our goal was to use ‘profits’ from property developments to subsidise our housing stock costs to tenants and rollover ‘surpluses’ to continue the construction programme. We weren’t quite sure how we would get there but we knew where we were going, we wanted to be self supporting. We knew it wouldn’t happen overnight. Or would it?

We had the support of the Local and State government and then along came the National Housing Policy, the vision for the major injection of capital into the Australian public housing sector in many years. The ‘National Stimulus’ funding and then NRAS support for the private investment market to provide more rental housing to the low income workers, our working poor.

The GCHC has been successful in utilising the funding programmes that have been provided to the sector by the change in National Housing Policy. Housing Affordability Fund (HAF) National Stimulus projects totalling approximately $68 M and approval for over 400 NRAS properties in Round one, we are being considered for approval on over 1,000 NRAS properties in Round three. In four short years the CEO Jason Cubit and the Foundation Board of Directors have managed the rapid growth admirably to be now recognised as one of the four major g community housing growth providers in Queensland.

We have achieved in that time all of our goals for Housing Pathways to now be able to announce the launch of our first Shared Equity home ownership scheme.

GCHC Launches Private Shared Equity Home Ownership Scheme

Not-for-profit Gold Coast Housing Company (GCHC) launched the Gold Coast’s first private shared equity home ownership scheme in August, giving buyers the opportunity to purchase a property for 25 per cent less than market value.

Three homes and one duplex, located in Upper Coomera, are available under the innovative scheme, with prices starting from $214,000. “This is the first time a shared equity offer like this has been brought to the table by a private company for the general public,” Mr Cubit said.

“I think this opportunity will strongly appeal to first home buyers who may use their federal government grant to further reduce the cost, although it is also an attractive option for second or third time purchasers who have been priced out of the market.

“Under our shared equity scheme, buyers will pay 75 per cent of the purchase price, with the remaining 25 per cent equity retained in a mortgage to the GCHC.

“This creates a unique opportunity for people to step out of the rent trap and own property at an extremely affordable price, and allows the GCHC to assist people through a pathway of housing options as their situation improves.” Eligible purchasers will be selected by ballot.

A variety of layouts are available including a two bedroom duplex priced at $214,000, one two bedroom home for $266,000 and two three bedroom homes available at $277,000.

The duplex is currently being built, while construction of the three homes will commence once sold, with the entire project due for completion in October this year.

Mr Cubit says all properties represent fantastic value and are centrally located in the new ‘Central Place’ estate on Days Road, in the surging Upper Coomera region.

“Statistics show that the median home price for Upper Coomera is about $420,000, while the Gold Coast median value is now approximately $516,250, so a brand new property in the $200,000 bracket in this region is a rare find”, he said.

“These new homes are located about one kilometre west of the approved $1 billion Coomera Town Centre, which is set to boast numerous new retail and commercial facilities, delivering up to 20,000 new job opportunities.

“They are also across the road from Coomera Anglican College and Assisi Catholic College.”

In addition to the shared equity homes, GCHC has a limited number of properties available with a $10,000 discount through the Housing Affordability Fund (HAF). Just five of 16 HAF homes remain available and are priced from $387,000.

In addition to the Upper Coomera development, GCHC is responsible for the development and management of a range of affordable housing projects on the Gold Coast and throughout Queensland.

GCHC has plans to roll out almost 1,000 affordable properties throughout Queensland by 2011, with over half of these set to be built on the Gold Coast.

All funds raised by GCHC through tenancy management are retained by the charity and used to fund additional projects.

For more information about GCHC please visit www.gchousingco.com.au or call 07 5597 6300.
Tenancy Law and Homelessness: A Queensland Perspective on a National Issue

By Maria Tennant, Lurline Comerford, Sally Watson and Selina Toohey, Tenants’ Union of Queensland

This article explores the interconnection between tenancy law and homelessness and discusses ways that tenancy law reform can contribute to alleviating homelessness caused from lack of protection.

Homelessness in Australia has increased dramatically over the past 10 years. Many more people are finding shelter in marginalised parts of the housing rental sector living in insecure tenancies without the legal protection available to other renters.

Some of the groups at greater disadvantage include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; young people; people who have been in state care during their childhood; seniors; people with a disability, and people with health issues.

Supported accommodation is not keeping up with the demand and social housing stocks are too low (only three percent in Queensland) to make a significant difference. Households with the least resources and capacity to compete in the market are currently facing the worst impacts. Over 400,000 or just over a third of Queensland households are renters. These people do not have adequate protection under the law.

Many of these households are also in ‘housing stress’ (around 66%) having inadequate income, once they have paid the rent, to pay for food, medicine, schooling, transport and other essentials.

Tenancy law reform is obviously not the sole answer to the problem of homelessness, given the massive undersupply of housing and lack of affordability, it does have a role to play in mitigating homelessness through greater protection of tenant rights. Deficiencies in the protections offered by tenancy law put people at greater risk of homelessness.

Six National Concerns

A recent study undertaken by National Association of Tenancy Organisations (NATO) for National Shelter, A Better Lease on Life: Improving Australian Tenancy Law (2010) highlights some key issues faced by renters in regard to the quality of their tenure in the rental market and how these issues are interconnected with homelessness.

The study was funded by the Australian Government driven by concerns about lack of legal protection for boarders and lodgers and that ‘without grounds’ terminations of a tenancy agreement may be a law used to unreasonably force tenants to leave their home and become homeless (FAHCSIA, 2008).
The report compares key aspects of tenancy law across all Australian states and territories and includes the quality of tenancy protections such as: the legislation and its application; rents and costs; tenancy terms and conditions; security of tenure, terminations and evictions; dispute resolution; and access to housing.

It identifies six national concerns which, if redressed, would have the potential to mitigate homelessness or alleviate a major deficiency in the quality of tenancy protections.

1. **Without cause** - evictions: The single most important issue identified across all jurisdictions are the lessor’s ability to evict a tenant with no cause; also evictions resulting from: a. Inconsistent and inadequate notice periods for terminations; b. Inadequate opportunity to redress a termination notice for rent arrears; c. Mortgages possession;

2. **Lack of legislative coverage** - of marginal groups including: boarders and lodgers and inconsistent and irregular coverage of renters in caravans;

3. **Lack of minimum housing standards**;

4. **Unjust and unreasonable operation of tenancy databases**;

5. **Excessive rent increases and inadequate notice periods**, and

6. **Limited ability of disadvantaged and vulnerable tenants to access information, advocacy and early intervention and support**.

**A Queensland Perspective: Recent Reforms**

The Queensland Government in partnership with the National Government and the community are working to address homelessness.

From a tenancy protection perspective, the Queensland Government recently introduced tenancy law reforms namely, additional protections under the new legislation providing for fairer timeframes on notices to leave to tenants at the end of a fixed term agreement and the regulation of tenancy databases (RTD). Both measures will assist in mitigating homelessness.

**Regulation of Residential Tenancy Databases**

The Queensland Government recognised, some years ago, that a listing on a RTD contributes to preventing access to housing. Queensland renters now have a reasonable level of protection from tenancy database abuses — they have a mechanism for disputing a listing. However, there is still lack of control over the length of listings on a RTD.

**Case 1: ‘Beryl’**

*Beryl* is an older renter with medical conditions moving between insecure accommodations.

Beryl, a single pensioner in her late 60s has multiple medical conditions. The most relevant are severe food allergies and a condition affecting her mobility that if not managed carefully could result in the amputation of her legs. A number of required medications are not on the PBS and Beryl’s financial situation places her in housing stress.

Beryl’s home was a room in a residential service in a regional centre outside Brisbane for five years. Previously she had lived in public housing from where she moved when she could not manage the stairs because of undiagnosed emphysema (now treated). For a number of years, Beryl also lived with and cared for her mother in law with dementia and her sons’ children.

The TUQ became involved with Beryl after she and others received a letter informing them of a rent increase of 59%. This letter was not a correct notice and was missing key details like when the increase would apply. It also stated the rent would now be a flat rate and cover food, linen and electricity. This was simply impossible for Beryl: due to her severe food allergies she would be unable to partake of the food offered and she was unable to afford food she could not eat as she would not be able to afford critical medications.

Upon investigation it was discovered that no resident had received a written agreement as required under the legislation and that the provider was not accredited under the Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002. This supported Beryl’s view the provider would not be able to deliver the specialised diet she needed. Beryl later reported that one of the owners had tried to convince the onsite manager/cook to provide special diet meals but had been unable to do so.

As the resident was fearful of eviction “onto the street” we advocated anonymously, talking to an owner of the premises to explain how intimidated the residents had been when told they had to pay the increase or be evicted. The owner admitted that the onsite manager was “a bit aggressive”.

During the advocacy process, Beryl decided to move out as the owners would not negotiate regarding the uptake of meals. At least one other resident also left.

At the time of moving to her new home (a private sector rental 2 bedroom unit in poor condition, with stairs), Beryl had still not received a correct notice to increase the rent and reported that another resident had paid the increase, purely out of fear of losing her accommodation.

Beryl is on the social housing register again but has been advised of a long wait time for housing in her community. Beryl is unwilling to consider a home outside her community. It is where her sister (who cooks her special meals) is located along with the charities that assist with medication and the mobility scooter as well as social visits and cleaning. Beryl literally “can’t afford to leave here.”

**New legislation**

The Residential Tenancies and Rooming Accommodation Act 2008 (RTRAA) which replaced the Residential Tenancies Act 1994 (Queensland) and the Residential Services (Accommodation) Act 2002 makes some new provisions.

- People who rent a room (termed ‘Residents’ in legislation) are now covered under the Act (albeit with more limited rights than ‘Tenants’).
- The only exception is when a provider lives on site then coverage applies only if there are at least four rooms available for occupation;
- Lessor must now provide Tenants with two months (previously only two weeks) notice to leave at the end of a fixed term lease;
- An Agent or Provider must provide a copy of the tenancy/residency agreement;
- There is more opportunity for tenants to dispute terms of agreements;
- New dispute options if breaches are not remedied by the lessor;
- Premises must be advertised for a fixed amount of rent otherwise the Tenant must not be required to pay a bond;
- Rent cannot be increased for Tenants any more often than every six months. It remains at four weeks for Residents;
- New provisions prohibit open houses and the use of photos including Tenants’ goods for advertising without Tenant’s written consent;
- In specified circumstances, Tenants now have the right to terminate early in a new fixed term agreement if the premises are advertised for sale without prior notice, and
- Notice periods for mortgagee possessions have increased from one month to two months and the Tenant on a fixed term agreement is not liable for any rent if they move out. Residents now have 30 days.

**Unfinished business**

The Act still excludes renters, including boarders and lodgers residing in premises with the provider on site and less than four rooms available for occupation. Marginal renters, who are often more vulnerable in the current market are worst affected by this exclusion which also applies to Aboriginal hostels and supported accommodation for less than 13 weeks. All renters require legal protection.
**Distortion**

The increased notice period for ‘without grounds’ termination at the end of a fixed term is intended to give tenants time to find an appropriate property and move. However, some agents and lessors are using this provision of two months notice to leave at the end of a fixed term lease to threaten a notice to terminate their agreement two to three months out from the end date of their current fixed term agreement if a tenant does not renew a tenancy agreement.

This distorts the purpose of the reform. Moreover, if the provision to evict tenants ‘without grounds’ continues (see below), restrictions should be placed on how long out from the end of a fixed term agreement one can be issued so tenants do not have to decide to renew their lease a long time prior to the end of their current agreement.

Recent indications are that agents and lessors who are not satisfied with the increased notice period have been lobbying to have it watered down. Any changes in favour of the desire to shorten notice periods will once again leave tenants inadequate time to find a new home and potentially lead to homelessness — through no fault of their own.

**But the Single Most Important Issue... Eliminating the use of ‘without ground’ evictions**

Private rental housing in the Australian housing market is fundamentally insecure because properties move between owner-occupier and rental tenures.

Evictions without a just cause add to this insecurity and contribute to a power differential between tenants and lessors by virtue of the ever present threat of eviction.

Tenants moving into a property are virtually at the mercy of a lessor’s monopoly given the cost of ‘taking their business elsewhere’. Tenants find themselves trading off their rights against the fear of eviction. This is particularly true for those who perceive or know they have limited alternative options. In this way, ‘without ground’ evictions and the failure or inability to challenge excessive rent increases, the pursuit of repairs and tenants’ acceptance of substandard properties are interconnected (National Shelter 2010, TUQ 2007).

Notices to leave without grounds provide a readymade provision for agents and lessors to evict for retaliatory or discriminatory reasons. Whilst a tenant can challenge eviction on the basis of retaliation, proving a link between the tenants enforcing their rights and the actions of the terminations notice can be difficult. (NATO/National Shelter, 2010, p24).

Overall, tenancy laws should seek to allow eviction only as a last resort.

Law reform that provides reasonable grounds for termination would neither require nor entail a change to the structure of the rental market or the investment strategies of lessors.

Lessors could still pursue remedies for the greatest risks i.e. unpaid rent and damage to property. They could still sell their property to owner-occupiers, redevelop their property, or move into the housing themselves.

**Insights: The Lack of Consumer Protection Places People at Risk of Homelessness in Queensland**

These case studies from tenant advocates (in Brisbane and North Queensland) highlight the impacts of tenancy law deficiencies like the ever present threat of ‘no grounds’ evictions and the interconnection between a range of issues including the needs of ageing people, discrimination and housing management practices.

‘Beryl’s’ case study shows just how vulnerable older renters are in the housing market. It demonstrates the power imbalance between providers or lessors and residents or tenants and how rights are often traded off against the fear of eviction. Also significant is the role that ‘support linked to housing’ plays in sustaining health and home (Bridge et al, 2003) and the important role social housing can play. The tenant aspires to be rehoused in public housing.

**Case Study 2: ‘Nancy’**

‘Nancy’ is an Indigenous woman fighting to keep her home.

In 2009, Nancy a single Indigenous mother, who had been a public housing tenant of 11 years standing, was threatened with termination of her tenancy on the grounds that her household repeatedly ‘interfered with the reasonable peace, comfort or privacy’ of her neighbours (s184(c), RTFA Act 2008).

Nancy was incredibly upset that she might lose her home and about two other things in particular.

First was the ongoing punitive and often racist treatment of her household, by her neighbours. Second were her failed efforts to get the Department to listen to her side of the story in relation to this so-called breach.

Above all, Nancy was resolute that she had not in fact caused any breach of this section of the Act and was therefore at a loss as to how she could remedy it.

People did come and go from her home — after all she was from a nearby Indigenous Community. However, she was always at pains to make sure guests kept their noise down especially after hours, and she was quick to kick them out if they did not comply.

Nancy was assisted on a range of fronts: we wrote to the Department and asked for the breach notice to be withdrawn because it was based on unsubstantiated uncorroborated evidence (to no avail).

We made application for RTA Dispute Resolution services (and did not achieve success). We made formal complaints about Nancy’s treatment by Departmental Officers dealing with the issue — first to the Department’s internal ‘Appeals and Review Unit’ and then to its ‘Ethical Standards Unit’.

Our complaints centred on the Department’s unwillingness to record her side of the story, and on the rude behaviour displayed towards her by the officers concerned. We also FO’d the Queensland Police records which the Department were relying on for key evidence of the alleged breach. In our view these records did not substantiate much more than the fact that the neighbours made complaints about the tenants’ household. Together we met with the Area Manager and were informed that the Department was unlikely to be able to resolve the issues.

Finally an offer was made to assist in a Departmental initiated housing transfer to another location — which in the end seemed like the best solution available. Although Nancy and her children (including foster children) would have preferred to continue living at her current address, at all turns it seemed her neighbours’ views were considered credible and worth taking action on, while hers were not. No efforts were ever made to test any the views of either tenant or neighbours.
people with a valid unmet request for new and immediate accommodation being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (AIHW, 2010).

Regardless of the fact that the tenant, in the case study, had 11 years rental history in public housing, her housing was under threat and without the additional support and advocacy provided by the tenant advocate her family would now be homeless.

As it stands, they will be paying the price of a forced move which will come at a financial cost and disruption to their lives. It highlights the importance of the social housing provider’s role, as housing provider of last resort, to sustain housing for groups at risk of homelessness due to discrimination — the threat that their ‘difference’ poses to mainstream community. Best practice in social housing management must be focussed on mitigating the risks that can lead into homelessness.

**Tenancy Law Reform: A National Framework**

**Law reform**

Queensland leads the nation in reforming regulation of tenancy data bases and now coordinates the development of nationally consistent tenancy database regulation.

In recognition of the success of this model, NATO has argued for a coordinated cross-jurisdictional approach through the established mechanisms aimed at coordination of work between the States, Territories and the Australian Government (e.g. the National Affordable Housing Agreement, National Partnership on Homelessness Agreement and Ministerial Council).

A coordinated cross-jurisdictional approach will provide a consistent and harmonised basis for the reform of key tenancy laws, in line with national standards to achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.

Creating minimum requirements or standards for the operation of legal principles will eliminate major differences of the laws across jurisdictions.

The recommendations for national tenancy law reform to mitigate homelessness include:

- Preventing arbitrary and unreasonable evictions by removing the ability to evict tenants without any grounds;
- Ensuring adequate and relative notice periods for evictions to allow tenants the chance to find alternative premises before they are evicted;
- Maximising the chances for tenants to rectify rent arrears prior to eviction and restore the income stream of their lessor;
- Providing tenancy law protections, relative to the tenure type, to all Australian renters; and
- Providing timely access to tenancy advice and advocacy to prevent evictions. (National Shelter, 2010, p40).

These reforms will improve tenancy laws for tenants and their families left unprotected or disadvantaged by unjust laws and practices that can lead to homelessness and marginalisation in Queensland and across the nation.

**Access to housing, advice and support**

Access to housing is not just about securing a residence, it also means maintaining that housing and ensuring it continues to be provided on fair and legal terms. Knowledge about and availability of advice and advocacy services for tenants is vital.

Tenancy advice, advocacy and support services are not always readily available to tenants at risk. Groups who are discriminated against, those with special or complex needs require coordinated support and assistance including tenancy advice and advocacy.

This applies especially to the areas of: tenant representation at court/tribunal hearings; better integration with social support services and specialist services or advocates for Indigenous tenants. Tenant advice services need to extend their capacity to:

- Provide a duty advocate at the relevant Tribunal;
- Provide advocacy services, linked to case management, to enable tenant advice services to bring their knowledge and skills to the table, under a case management model, to provide holistic support to people who are at risk of homelessness; and
- Provide specialist tenants advice services, including for Indigenous renters, where a greater emphasis should be placed on community education with both tenants and. Where appropriate, housing providers.

The Queensland Government leads the nation in reforming regulation of tenancy data bases... the reform process has started. The opportunity now exists to address other tenancy laws and practices that deny basic consumer protection or place people at risk of homelessness.

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Lynette lost her husband, her home, her livelihood and her health, and almost lost her family. She was forced to confront homelessness and what she calls “horrendous” living conditions. She believes what happened to her could happen to anyone. Now, Lynette is in a secure, affordable tenancy in a Brisbane Housing Company’s apartment at Kelvin Grove Urban Village.

She has few possessions but has friends, good relationships with her children, is regaining her health and seeking part-time work. Lynette offers her story with the advice that we should all plan to deal with the worst of circumstances.

Lynette’s story began 13 years ago when her husband, a builder, was diagnosed with melanoma. Within a week he was in hospital to have an eye removed. Lynette cared for him at home. Bedridden, he was unable to work, and they lost their business, which was also her livelihood. Lynette’s husband passed away at the age of 46, leaving her to raise their three children.

Lynette’s circumstances didn’t improve. Two weeks after her husband died, her bank told her that she had no choice but to sell the family home. “It’s awful to think you can go from being well off and happy and lose everything,” Lynette says. “What happened to us was like night and day. We’d been very happy. My husband was a wonderful man and our children meant the world to both of us.”

For a time, Lynette rented privately. She studied at night to gain a certificate in horticulture, and established her own landscaping business. She worked every day, refusing to give up. “There’s no way I would have just sat down and not done anything. I just had to keep working to keep the kids in reasonable housing, and carrying on with their schooling.”

Then, five years on, Lynette had what she describes as a nervous breakdown. She spent the next three months in hospital, undergoing electric shock therapy “and all sorts of horrible things.” Her youngest child was 15 at the time.

“The children did not really understand what was happening to me,” she now says. “The older kids were 18 and 20 and they looked after the youngest, but they’d known me as a really strong person, always capable. Now they saw I was falling apart, not coping.”

For a time, the children stayed on in the rental home. While studying, the children’s part-time jobs helped pay the rent. Everyone had to pitch in. Out of hospital, Lynette stayed at home for a while. She tried to work, but suffered memory loss from the shock treatment. Getting through each day was a struggle. Eventually, with the children staying with friends, Lynette found herself in the Salvation Army’s Pindari hostel for women.

“Horrendous. I met many strange people, and strange experiences or understanding of mental illness,” Lynette says. “They’re special,” she says. But many did not. She feels these people had no experience or understanding of mental illness, and didn’t know how to react to her. “They just don’t want to know you. They can’t talk about it; it’s a bit of a taboo. I think they were frightened to talk to me, there was the financial stuff, but mostly I think it was the mental illness.”

At this point, Lynette was facing homelessness. She could stay at Pindari no longer than three months, and had no capacity to rent privately. Her fortunes changed when she was offered a studio unit in Brisbane Housing Company’s development at Warry Street in the Valley, at a rent she could pay. Her income at the time was a disability pension.

“It wasn’t very glamorous,” says Lynette, “but to me it was a palace, because I was coming from such an awful place. And it was okay for a time, but I wanted to be closer to my children on the north side, so I put my name down and got a one-bedroom unit at a new Brisbane Housing Company place at Kelvin Grove.”

Lynette also had help from a charity, Second Chance. “They help with a little bit of rent if you’re finding it hard, and help with furniture and bits and bobs when people move into a unit. When people come from a hostel they often have nothing.”

Before this, Lynette hadn’t known of Brisbane Housing Company or Second Chance. She still says she cannot imagine what she’d have done, trying to live on the streets. “My children found all this very difficult. They did not want to face it all, and I think they blamed me a lot, maybe for just getting sick, not being able to cope. But now we get on fine. I am very proud of them; each of them has one or two university degrees.”

Lynette goes on: “I can’t afford a car, but I’m close to everything here, I have shops down the road, doctors close by. I’ve made friends in the units. I don’t have any possessions, I don’t have things, but my health is getting better. I have my children, my friends. This has been a real turn-around.”

Lynette’s next task is to find part-time work, preferably in horticulture, perhaps in a nursery. For others, Lynette offers this advice: “I hope people can organise their lives to avoid what I have been through. I never want to go through this ever again. I was not someone who slept on park benches and things, but I could have been. Now I am in this unit and I know I can stay here, it is not the sort of place where you have to get out if the owner decides to sell. There are fifty units here and I don’t know what most of the tenants would do without the Housing Company.”

She adds: “I would say always remember, don’t be too proud to ask for help. There are people out there who will help, you just have to be sure you find them, and don’t give up. You are not alone.”
The National Affordable Rental Scheme (NRAS): Strengthening Affordable Housing Options

By Tegan Richardson, Policy Officer, Queensland Shelter

The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) was introduced in 2008 as a means to attract large scale investment into new affordable rental dwellings. Investors receive Commonwealth and State incentives, currently equating to $8672 per year per dwelling for ten years while the property is rented at 20% below market rates.

As the scheme progresses, NRAS properties will be located throughout the state, providing additional exit points, and affordable housing options, helping to alleviate rental stress within Queensland.

NRAS was designed to target low to middle income earners such as child-care-workers, police officers, teachers and bakers. The income eligibility cap is up to $42,000 for single tenants and $100,768 for a couple with three children. However, over two thirds of the households placed in NRAS with three children. However, over two thirds of the households placed in NRAS properties have incomes lower than $40,000.

Although NRAS was not designed to target homelessness, providing eligibility criteria are met some currently homeless people, particularly those experiencing secondary and tertiary homelessness, could be suitable candidates for NRAS properties.

Potential tenants are required to register with the Department of Communities. Tenants registered on the One Social Housing System (OSHS) housing register who meet the NRAS criteria are automatically eligible for NRAS properties. Potential tenants not eligible for social housing can also apply for NRAS dwellings via a separate ‘NRAS only’ list with the Department of Communities.

Of the NRAS properties already completed, applicants on the OSHS housing register have tenanted 20% of the available properties. The Department of Communities manages the register however lists are referred to property managers. NRAS developers are encouraged to obtain property management through community housing organisations over private real estate agents where possible as they are more likely to support the interests of tenants less able to obtain rentals through the private market.

Additionally, upon registering with the Department of Communities, applicants listed under the OSHS can access support services from Rent Connect for assistance in obtaining and sustaining these tenancies. Many homeless people would not meet the criteria to obtain an NRAS property, however, the interconnectedness of the housing market must be taken into consideration in terms of the impact the scheme can make to their lives.

NRAS was designed to target low to middle income earners, who, due a shortage of rental stock which inflated prices, have been renting dwellings that would have otherwise been reserved for those who need them the most — people with extremely low incomes.

By adding to the stock in the middle of the spectrum for low to moderate income earners, the stock previously rented by NRAS tenants can be freed for the tenants with the lower incomes.

This in turn has a flow effect additionally freeing up accommodation in boarding houses and social housing leased by tenants wishing to acquire greater stability and longer leases in private rentals.

The added benefit of an influx of stock is the dampening of demand over supply hence reducing the pressure on prices. The reduced market price advertised by NRAS managers also encourages competing property owners to adjust their prices accordingly.

Of the 50,000 NRAS incentives to be allocated nationwide, Queensland will receive approximately 12, 400 over the next few years.

Although this falls short of the current deficit of 62,750 affordable rental properties, all additions to stock make a positive impact. To date, already 286 applicants have been housed in NRAS properties.

Queensland Shelter alongside National Shelter recommends the incoming Government maintain their commitment to support an additional 50,000 NRAS incentives after the current scheme concludes subject to ongoing demand.

To find out more about NRAS refer to the FaHCSIA website or to determine if you are eligible for an NRAS property, refer to the following fact sheet from the Queensland Government, Housing and Homelessness Services: (http://www.public-housing.qld.gov.au/renting/pdf/nras_prospective_tenant...).


If you would like to speak with someone directly regarding eligibility or available properties you may also contact the department’s call centre on 1300 880 882.

Footnotes
1. Robyn Zakharov, Department of Communities, (Housing and Homelessness Services).
2. Robyn Zakharov, Department of Communities, (Housing and Homelessness Services).
3. Kevin Bottle, Department of Communities, (Housing and Homelessness Services).
New Partnerships for Managing Growth and Affordability

By Paul Eagles, CEO, Queensland Urban Land Development Authority (ULDA) and Rebecca Oelkers, Business Development Manager, Brisbane Housing Company (BHC)

Challenges of Growth

Queensland faces significant challenges in managing development and growth and delivering improved affordability in the housing sector to support and sustain that growth, while ensuring strong economic performance and sustainable social outcomes. The Queensland Government is progressively strengthening its capacity to meet these challenges through a combination of legislative changes and planning reform, institution building, and new partnerships and collaborations.

The Urban Land Development Authority (ULDA) is a key initiative of the Queensland Government’s Housing Affordability Strategy. An independent statutory authority empowered by the Urban Land Development Act 2007 to plan and manage development in designated Urban Development Areas (UDAs), the key mechanisms the Authority uses for improving housing affordability are:

- getting land to market faster;
- reducing development approval times; and
- simplifying planning requirements.

The ULDA’s initial responsibility has been to develop UDAs at Northshore Hamilton, Bowen Hills and Fitzgibbon in Brisbane City. Added to these are newly designated UDAs in Townsville, Mackay, Gladstone, Ripley Valley, Greater Flagstone, Yarrabilba, Moranbah, Blackwater, Roma and Wooloongabba. The circumstances include inner urban “infill” development, new communities in “greenfield” areas, and promoting decentralisation and supporting regional sustainability in resource communities. In Brisbane City, the Brisbane Housing Company (BHC) is a key partner with the ULDA in delivering affordable housing within the UDAs.

Delivering Affordability

Each area presents different challenges, and the ULDA’s role varies in each case. In some the ULDA is landowner, planning authority and developer; in some the Authority manages development but does not own land. The capacity to deliver improved affordability varies in each UDA. Overall, the target is to deliver 15% of new dwellings in the UDAs as affordable either for purchase or rent, and the ULDA aims to achieve this primarily through the market, offering savings via the mechanisms listed above.

In the role of developer the ULDA expects to be able to deliver some 50–70% of homes as affordable for sale or rent to households on low to moderate incomes. This is achievable in greenfields sites such as Fitzgibbon Chase in Brisbane’s northern suburbs. In infill areas such as Bowen Hills the result may be nearer 15 per cent. Infill development is more expensive and the speed with which land can be delivered to the market is slower. In greenfields sites subdivisions can be designed at the outset to include smaller lots and a variety of dwelling types, and a master-planned community can be built from scratch.

A significant barrier to marketplace affordability is the insistence in some local government areas of large minimum lot sizes. Some local governments are reluctant to consider subdivisions with lots smaller than 450m² or in other cases, where they are permitted, additional approvals are required. However, reducing lot sizes can contribute significantly to improved affordability and prove acceptable to planners and the community if coupled with quality design. The ULDA favours delivering a variety of lot sizes and dwelling types rather than turning broad areas into homogenous small lots with identical dwellings. Careful planning of road widths and rear lanes also creates space for neighbourhood parks and other community facilities.

The insistence on high levels of car parking is a further barrier to affordability in multi-unit dwellings in infill areas. Removing car parking from the cost equation can shave $70,000 off the price of an apartment. In areas well-serviced by public transport and well-located in relation to community facilities and employment, this meets a growing demand from urban dwellers willing to make new kinds of choices about lifestyle and household expenditure.

Finally, a significant barrier is that ‘affordable housing’ can be viewed negatively in the community. Local residents may resist affordable housing developments, perceiving them to be poor in design, destined to house undesirable people, and out of character with existing development in a neighbourhood. Analysis shows that affordable housing is needed by a wide range of households in the community, including people with secure employment and mid-range incomes.

Affordable housing, as developed for the...
market and by community housing organisations utilising varying levels of subsidy, can be well-designed to blend with existing development. Well-managed affordable rental housing frequently manifests vacancy and arrears rates well below those in the commercial rental market. Where effective engagement strategies are adopted, affordable housing readily finds acceptance in local communities. The ULDA’s experience with BHC developments in the Brisbane area bears this out.

The mantra here is that considerable savings can be achieved through innovative products and significant reductions in lot sizes. At the same time market and community acceptance is delivered through good design of subdivisions and dwellings, and community development is supported through the inclusion of social infrastructure and communal open space.

The ULDA has articulated this approach in the Residential 30 Guidelines which show how densities up to 30 dwellings per hectare can be achieved with good neighbourhood design and a variety of lot sizes. The availability of these Guidelines enables any developer or local government to pursue these principles, and is an important demonstration of the ULDA’s leadership across the market.

**Partnerships for Affordable Housing**

The ULDA’s focus is on housing affordability, and it is not itself a provider of affordable housing. However, the Authority is able to facilitate the delivery of subsidised housing products through partnerships and collaboration with the State Government (Department of Communities) and community housing organisations like BHC. This means social housing and affordable housing can be planned into new communities at an early stage.

BHC’s two affordable housing developments in the Fitzgibbon UDAs are an example of this early stage planning in action. The 22 townhouse development (in Fitzgibbon Chase) and the 64 unit development (in Carselgrove Avenue) comply with guidelines covering the scale and bulk of buildings, and uses are consistent with the Fitzgibbon Chase Master Plan. The result is well-designed projects accepted by and integral to the community. In both instances BHC purchased the land from the ULDA, and the developments were funded in part by National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) incentives and Commonwealth Economic Stimulus funds.

At Hurworth Street in the Bowen Hills UDA, BHC is a 107 unit mixed tenure residential development on land obtained from Brisbane City Council. As with the Fitzgibbon projects, the ULDA provided Development Approval very quickly, delivering major savings to the Company which translate directly into affordability outcomes. From BHC’s point of view, the relationship with the ULDA is excellent; both organisations deliver on their respective charters through this partnership.

Alongside BHC’s projects at Fitzgibbon, the ULDA will deliver affordable housing to the market, including above-garage apartments (often called “Fonzie flats”), small-lot houses, and a new product, the “warehouse apartment,” with a minimal fit-out enabling purchasers to complete the interior to their own standard of design and finish.

The ULDA welcomes the involvement of affordable housing providers in planning for and delivering affordable housing. The Authority is forging relationships with new affordable housing companies in Maranoa, Mackay and elsewhere; each partnership varies to suit local needs and circumstances. Collaborations with local governments are critical: many of the housing companies are established with local government support. At Andergrove in Mackay, the UDA is a joint venture with Mackay Regional Council. The ULDA works with housing providers and local governments as part of the toolkit for managing the challenges of growth and affordability.

**Partnerships for Jobs and Communities**

The announcement of Urban Development Areas at Ripley Valley in Ipswich City, and at Greater Flagstone and Yarrabilba in Logan City requires the ULDA to develop new centres on a large scale. These areas will eventually be home to some 250,000 people.

Job creation will be a critical factor in the success of these centres. A vital task is to establish links between residential development, population growth and employment centres, including industrial areas such as Bromelton and Yatala. The ULDA will dedicate staff and resources to working with Councils, State Government and regional economic boards to ensure the effectiveness of these links, to underpin the future sustainability of the new centres.

By contrast, in the mining areas, the ULDA’s task is to provide residential development to meet the needs of a growing workforce. Local workers not engaged in mining projects — service workers, local government employees and others — cannot access quality housing at a reasonable price, with much of the existing housing stock occupied by mine workers and contractors. Unable to compete in markets where housing supply is slow and expensive, some have found themselves virtually homeless even while fully employed, such has been the impact of the resources boom. Providing affordable homes for people such as a local taxi driver or child care worker will reinforce the viability of local services and support economic diversity and sustainability.

**New Institutions for Growth Management**

The ULDA will work closely with Growth Management Queensland (GMQ), established as a key element of the Queensland Government’s response to the challenges identified at the recent Growth Management Summit. As an example, among the tasks for GMQ is the establishment of an Infrastructure Charges Task Force to reform and simplify local government infrastructure charges, another significant cost factor in new housing development. The ULDA’s experience in development will help inform deliberations on this issue. In addition, the ULDA has the potential to be a useful part of the GMQ toolkit in addressing planning issues around the state through its statewide mandate.

**Homelessness**

From the perspective of the struggle to develop and improve responses to homelessness, these actions may appear high-level, and somewhat remote from the needs of service delivery and emergency relief. Yet it can be acknowledged that in Queensland, recent initiatives have accelerated the process of building effective growth management and planning institutions, as well as the organisations and processes for building affordable housing. The organisations that have emerged — the ULDA and BHC among them — are forging new and effective partnerships at all levels.

The ULDA’s role in addressing homelessness is preventive. Through partnerships with affordable housing providers such as BHC, through social planning and effective community engagement, and by reinforcing the nexus between housing and employment opportunities, the Authority helps build communities in which some of the pressures that lead people into homelessness — high housing costs, the lack of jobs, the absence of community infrastructure — are significantly reduced.

The result will be better planned, more sustainable and inclusive communities that provide, through affordable housing, more exits from homelessness. Through community-building and local and regional employment strategies, they will also provide better defences against the occurrence of homelessness. ■

**Footnotes**


Chapter 5: Consumer and Client Voices

My Ideal Home: Perspectives of the Homeless

By Joe Hurley and Gary Penfold, West End Community House

“I’ve been homeless since the age of seven. I have a drinking problem, suffer from arthritis, spent time in prison, been married but left because of domestic violence and have children. I live one day at time and am desperate for a home!”
— Indigenous woman sleeping rough, interviewed in Musgrave Park.

Introduction

The endeavours of all levels of Australian Government to reduce homelessness are progressing. However, the success of these endeavours will depend on their capacity to meet the expectations and aspirations of a number of key stakeholders, including the homeless themselves.

Between May 2009 and early February 2010 we met with 35 people who were currently homeless or who had been homeless. The final report will be on the West End Community House website in early to mid October 2010. See www.westendcommunityhouse.org.au.

The purpose of the research was to seek the views of people who had experienced homelessness on what they saw as their “ideal home”. In particular:

1. What are some of the core elements that contribute to their vision of an ideal home, e.g. location, affordability, management practices, furnishings, neighbours, condition of building, dwelling type, etc?
2. What would help them sustain themselves in their ideal home, e.g. support services, income, house rules, security, skill development, social networks, etc?

The report when complete will not provide definitive answers to the above questions. However, it may provide insights into some of the expressed needs and aspirations of disadvantaged people as they transition from “street to home”. To date there have been limited opportunities for the more marginalised community members to have input into both Government and NGO housing peaks housing/homelessness policy frameworks and/or strategic and operational plans developed for their intended benefit.

Good intentions do not always translate into good outcomes and a consumer housing/homelessness voice may provide the Federal and Queensland Governments and NGO sector with a more complete picture of the aspirations of consumers as they work collaboratively toward the goal of ending homelessness in Queensland.

Research Methodology

Location

A total of 35 people were interviewed either on an individual or on a group basis. Locations where the interviews took place included Kelvin Grove Village, Roma House, Brisbane Youth Service, Open Doors, the Kurilpa Kiosk, West End Community House, New Farm Park, Musgrave Park, Boundary Street West End, Southbank Parklands and the Valley Mall.

Selection

All respondents agreed to be interviewed but specific locations were selected so as to ensure a reasonable sample of people would contribute to the research. All the respondents had experienced primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness with the majority of respondents still being homeless when the interviews took place. Twenty three people believed where their home is located are equally as important as the accommodation itself. Homeless Indigenous woman speaking on the importance of the South Brisbane region for her and other local community members.

Research Findings

Some of the aspirations relating to their ideal home:

Affordability:

“No one should have to pay more than 25% to 30% of their Centrelink cheque on rent. Everyone has the right to pay no more than this”
— Female staying at Roma House.

Twenty six people believed affordable rent was a crucial factor in meeting their perception of what constitutes an ideal home. One social housing tenant indicated that even in social housing he cannot afford to purchase “meals on wheels” stating that “at $7.50 per meal it is just too expensive”.

Location:

“The history of Kurilpa is important for our community to remember. It is important for the younger generation to engage with the Elders of our community so that they can relate to them and stay connected with their history”
— Homeless Indigenous woman speaking on the importance of the South Brisbane region for her and other local community members.

Twenty three people believed where their home is located are equally as important as the accommodation itself. Homeless people often develop strong social and service provider support networks in the areas they reside.

Housing is one of a number needs they juggle with. Moving them away from their territory may impact on their capacity to sustain a “home of their own”.

My Ideal Home: Perspectives of the Homeless
Housing and homelessness policy should not overlook the importance of the relationship between people and place.

**Garden/BBQ Area:**

I would like a home with a backyard so when I get my daughter back from DoC’s she can have a swing set up in the garden. I also want to grow vegetables so we can eat cheap and healthy. A homeless woman sleeping rough.

Twenty people mentioned the importance of a garden and BBQ area as a prerequisite in their ideal home. They were seen as a social outlet for meeting other residents and inviting friends over. As a recreational outlet for growing plants and vegetables, a therapeutic outlet (‘it is relaxing being in the garden particularly when I have a mental illness’) and as a play area for children (many respondents had children and a home was their first step toward family reunion).

**Security:**

A place of safety and security surrounded by friendly neighbours who watch out for you and you watch out for them. A home where my daughters can visit me on the weekends and stay over the school holidays. A kid safe place. Indigenous man at Roma House.

Seventeen people believed good security was a prerequisite for their ideal home. However, there was little consensus on what constituted good security. A number of women had been traumatised by domestic violence and did not want to be exposed to this threat ever again. Respondents wanting to reconnect with their children viewed child safety as paramount and wanting to reconnect with their community. Two respondents wanted security to restrict police access to their home.

**Visitors:**

‘My friends including boyfriends can stay over. Strong friendships are what help sustain me and make me feel less on the outside.’ A young gay man in SAAP Accommodation.

Twenty four people stated that having family and friends come to visit and or stay overnight or longer would make a significant contribution to making their accommodation feel like a home. Several respondents saw home as a prerequisite in rebuilding damaged relationships with family members including children and or former partners. Others saw home as an opportunity to develop new relationships, ‘no home no girlfriend’ or to escape from violent relationships. Many respondents particularly Indigenous people and parents who had lost access to their children believed their visitors should have the right to stay overnight or longer. People saw their social, family and support worker networks as essential in rebuilding their lives. They are seeking more than just a roof over their head.

**Surrounding Infrastructure:**

‘I would like a place close to the city that has public transport, essential services and a park close by’ A single man at Roma House.

Twenty seven people stated their local infrastructure needs and local service provision featured prominently in their responses. The majority of respondents wanted their ideal home to be in close proximity to the city, parks, shops, support services, health services, training and work opportunities, neighbourhood centres (e.g. West End Community House and New Farm Neighbourhood) and social, recreational and arts based activities. Fear of boredom and social and geographic isolation were key themes in people’s responses to their ideal home.

**Friendly and Tolerant Neighbourhoods:**

A friendly neighbourhood where you aren’t judged for who you were but for who you are. A rough sleeper from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

Eighteen people passed on comments relating to the type of neighbourhood they would like to live in and their ideal neighbours. A number of respondents raised concerns related to discrimination on the basis of their race, gender, disability, age, appearance, employment status, criminal record, income status and sexual orientation. One Indigenous elder indicated he had lived in West End for many years and was feeling increasingly unwelcome by residents who often contact police to move him on. Changes to the ‘police move on powers’ may be contributing to people feeling more stigmatised in the localities they inhabit and this has implications for the type of housing that they are provided with and the attitudes of the community in which it is located. The NIMBY backlashes to social and public housing developments continue unabated as do intolerant community attitudes to homeless people.

Federal and State Government responses to this form of “social apartheid” have been seen as poor even though it has implications for disadvantaged people’s capacity to sustain a “home of their own”. Hostile community attitudes perhaps also pose the greatest risk to the success of the homeless strategies and to the considerable economic investment in future social housing provision. The majority of homeless respondents were acutely aware of hostile community attitudes towards them and this has left them with emotional and psychological scars that will take time to heal.

**Conclusion**

People who are homeless should be included in future consultations. Their needs and aspirations are important. This would be consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the Queensland Compact, the Social Inclusion Agenda and the Closing the Gap initiatives.

Neighbourhood Centres, legal, human rights, disability and Indigenous advocates and agencies such as the Big Issue and Reclink should be recognised and included in future planned responses and funding decisions related to ending homelessness. A consumer voice should be developed and resourced which reflects the housing aspirations of the most stigmatised and disadvantaged members of our community.

The Federal and State Governments should do more work in ameliorating the impacts of community backlashes to new social/public housing developments. Neighbourhood Centres could have a role in helping develop more tolerant communities.
Hello my name is Cowboy and I am 30 years old.

Everyone has a story to tell, I would like to tell you mine. In this story I will tell you a little bit about my experience of being homeless on the Gold Coast and my experience with the various services I encountered throughout my journey.

Firstly I would like to start by telling you some background around how I became homeless on the Gold Coast.

I first became homeless in 2006, due to losing my rental accommodation. I basically went broke and couldn’t afford the rent anymore and I wasn’t able to live with family for various reasons.

At this point I was living in Caboolture but spent some time in Cairns and Port Douglas before I decided to come to the Gold Coast. I remembered the Coast from when I was 20 and was down for schoolies, I remembered all the bush land and sand dunes and thought that there would be good places to sleep at night. So in early 2007 I came down. All I had with me were a swag and a backpack.

I found good places to sleep but mainly camped around the Spit area because I felt safer here than sleeping behind buildings in Surfers Paradise.

Initially I found living on the streets lonely as I didn’t know anyone. So would spend the day sitting in various parks.

I found a toilet block in Southport where there were showers. I used to go here on a regular basis to wash. It was here that I was asked one day by a stranger if I was homeless and I told him that I was camping out at the Spit.

He then told me about Set Free, an organisation which ran out of the hall which was right next door to the toilets and showers I used. He told me they provided meals for people on Tuesdays and Thursdays. So I started attending on a regular basis for lunch.

It was from attending Set Free and speaking with other patrons that I found out about all the places on the Gold Coast where I could access food.

So I started attending St Johns where they provide lunch Monday to Friday. I attended St Johns everyday as I could wash my clothes here, have a shower and a meal.

By this point I had been on the Coast for a while. I had found a good spot at the Spit but the weather wasn’t good so I brought myself a tent. I started to get fed up with carrying my stuff around so I came up with the idea of borrowing a wheelie bin and burying this in the ground to keep my stuff safe, out of sight and dry. To this day this wheelie bin is still being used by other homeless people who camp in this area.

It was at St Johns that I first heard about the Homeless Health Outreach Team (HHOT). I had heard through other patrons and the staff at St Johns about what HHOT did. It took me a few months to approach the team as I was a bit paranoid about other people and there were so many unknowns.

I finally approached HHOT as I needed medication for my mental health and required support with this. The staff at St Johns had been looking after my medication for me as it had previously been stolen while I was on the streets and then I had problems with other homeless approaching me for my medications.

I had previously been told I had Bi Polar Affectiveness Disorder (BPAD) when living in Caboolture. It was during this interaction that I told staff that I had a mental illness, experienced paranoia and heard voices.

HHOT assessed me and linked me in with the psychiatrist on the team who told me they thought I had schizophrenia not BPAD. HHOT supported me in understanding what schizophrenia was and assisted me in developing strategies to help me manage my mental health throughout my time living on the streets and even once I got into accommodation.

Other services I met with while at St Johns include Ozcare and Turning Point.

Ozcare helped by patching up my blisters which I got from walking from the Spit, where I was camping, to Surfers Paradise where the St Johns feed is every day of the week. Ozcare are also good to talk to and they listen to me.

They know me well now and are aware when I am becoming unwell and will speak with HHOT if they are concerned about me.

Turning Point is the other service I met through St Johns. Initially they didn’t think I needed help, but when I told them I did they helped me get off the streets and into Flinders House which is a boarding house.

The Turning Point staff were really great and supportive. They took me to housing appointments in Robina and helped me get onto the priority list for housing. I was in Finders House for around three months, I then obtained a unit through the Gold Coast Housing Company which Turning Point and HHOT assisted me to get into.

Initially I found the change of coming off the streets and into accommodation difficult. At times I felt like I wanted to get away and go camping again as this was familiar to me, but HHOT and Turning Point continued to support me and I was able to maintain my accommodation.

The services on the Gold Coast have helped me so much both on the streets and off. I love it. I think the services are really good, they are amazing, particularly for people who have a mental illness.

I found it helpful that I could access the services at the different feeds I attended and that they came to see me. HHOT are like my friend, they helped me through things and supported me.

I now have another bigger unit through the Gold Coast Housing Company which I am really enjoying and have been living here for over a year now.

Even though I have accommodation I still attend some of the feeds. I speak with the other patrons and tell them about the services and what they can help them with.

I have made some good friends throughout my journey and by continuing to attend these feeds I am able to maintain these friendships.

My next goal is to become a consumer companion and work with people who have a mental illness so I can share my story and show them that there is hope.
Ray’s View: Being Homeless and Living within Support Systems

Ray is a 35 year old male who is a resident of an Ozcare Hostel. It is his fifth admission in three years. A victim of physical and sexual abuse as a child, previously a heavy amphetamine user and still ‘dabbling’ in amphetamines, he is currently dealing with a substantive gambling addiction to the ‘Pokies’.

Ray is a highly intelligent man who at times offers significant insight into his life. He has been a successful farm manager and piggery manager.

Despite his situation of homelessness, he is a hard worker and goes picking vegetables most days for an income. However, he continues to maintain a self-destructive lifestyle with negative external relationships within the wider community. Ray has provided us with his view on being homeless and the system he lives within.

“As I contemplate from which perspective to write this, I know that my thoughts on the subject of being homeless and living within support systems have changed somewhat over time. What I originally perceived was, in fact, far removed from the truth. I considered in the first stage of my time as a hostel resident, that this whole idea of the system being genuinely concerned with helping the homeless, was a lie — that it was a big tangle of “b……t”, referrals and insincerity.

I see now that everything is actually placed where it is, for good reason. It’s obvious to me now that the system, failing or not, is an evolving, dare I say living thing, and that it’s current state is the consequence of a diverse range of opinions and deliberations.

To be honest, that’s actually woken me up, just a little. I even feel a little embarrassed about how naïve my opinion used to be, how I took it for granted that ‘I was right’. How wrong was I — quite exceedingly wrong. In my case, it was my own failure to attain what I wanted. I didn’t think I was asking too much from the system, and this reflected acutely in my naïve resentment.

In hindsight, I always thought I was lucky to be able to stay here, I liked it to grace, and these days I know why. It was because I felt as though I didn’t deserve to be here. Now I know that no-one is here because they deserve to be here. It was never about that, and equally, the last thing it is about, is homelessness. I am aware, however, of the fact that on face value, I can’t discriminate between somebody who is genuine or not. Perhaps the discrimination should be made before they become homeless, if that’s intervention, because whatever angle I come from, prevention is better.

My old friend (he’s older than me), I like him. When I see him eat, I’m reminded of the absence of ‘indignity’. He’s not got a lot in this world, but he’s generally articulate in matters concerning him, be it hygiene, hobbies or whatever, and he’s not made to feel like something other than human, e.g. by ‘not’ having sub-standard ‘slop’ thrown in front of him. I think it’s a good thing that his dignity isn’t challenged.

Another place could destroy a man like that, if there wasn’t genuine concern for helping the homeless, right down to such a small thing as spice in a meal.

The homeless people I’ve lived with, the individuals, no matter how different or similar to me, all share something in common. While the system has some order, the people in it certainly don’t. Their daily routine, their social behaviours, etc, — they’re all out of whack when they move into here, temporarily or not.

The fact that we’re homeless seems to be just one manifestation. Perhaps out there, people may be struggling with the same conditions without support. I’ve no reason to believe that ‘homelessness’ is the worst symptom of those possible conditions.

Well, at least the guys can get help here. They can have access to the phone, they have access to employment agencies, they have access to medical practitioners and all information regarding health, mental or otherwise.

They have transport to help with appointments, or in fact anything pro-active to increasing the chance of opportunity, whatever its nature. They have access to counselling, to self-help meetings and to peers who, even if only for company, may well be a medicine of sorts. (Sometimes I’m thankful my tolerance threshold is high!) Of course there are showers, toilets, washing machines, linen, television etc.

Anyway, out of all the things I could say, and there is much that is specific, it’s a generalisation from my own individual experience, with an unavoidable cliché: “The system is genuinely concerned with helping the homeless, but generally success is dependent on whether people like me can genuinely take the steps necessary to help ourselves.”
Even in Happy Families: A Case Study of Domestic and Family Violence

Kelly’s Story

Some members of the community may view homelessness arising from domestic violence as a relatively straightforward product of a woman escaping an abusive husband. If they are in a safe and happy relationship they may consider it could never happen to them.

However, as Kelly’s story demonstrates, homelessness through domestic and family violence is often a complex situation in which the persons involved have had no choice. They become totally reliant on the availability of services like the domestic violence refuges operated by Ozcare and other service providers.

Confidentiality is paramount in domestic violence refuges. As a consequence, the challenges and complexity of situations presented by clients to staff working in these refuges, are largely unseen and unheard, and therefore unknown to the community. This case study highlights one example of the complex nature of the cases which lead to homelessness.

Kelly, and her new husband Adam, were living a quiet life in a country town in Queensland, when Kelly’s adult daughter, Sandy, contacted them to say that she had taken on a second job.

This job included working at night, and Sandy was having trouble caring for her seven year old son, Ben. Kelly and Adam agreed to move to the city to help Sandy.

After arriving at Sandy’s home, Kelly and Adam were quite surprised and alarmed to learn that their daughter’s new boyfriend was a member of a bikie gang. After a short time of helping out, a disagreement arose when Sandy’s boyfriend accused Adam of abusing Ben. The boyfriend left the house and returned with two other bikie gang members who hit Adam, causing him to fall to the floor. The two bikies stomped on Adam’s head until he lost consciousness.

During the assault, Sandy did nothing to intervene to prevent her step-father Adam from being harmed, and Kelly had been forcibly held back by the boyfriend as she tried to protect Adam. Kelly called the Police as soon as the offenders had left.

Adam awoke in hospital to find that he had been in a coma. He was diagnosed with an Acquired Brain Injury and could neither walk nor talk. After a long period of rehabilitation Adam was eventually discharged from hospital.

Adam moved to a secure location to be cared for by his own family. The Police asked Kelly to provide a statement about the assault, however her daughter, Sandy tried to convince her that if she made a statement to Police, the bikies would kill her, as well as Sandy and Adam. Bravely and despite the threat, Kelly decided to make a statement and the Police provided protection for her under the Witness Protection Program.

Because of the isolation that Kelly experienced in the Witness Protection Program, the fear of reprisal, nightmares and flashbacks of Adam’s assault, and the memory that her only child had not tried to protect her husband, it all become too much for Kelly, and she left the program.

Two days later she tried to commit suicide. Kelly was admitted to a Mental Health Unit for a two week period where she was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The social worker from the hospital contacted DVconnect, a domestic violence referral service, as Kelly was still very fearful of reprisals from the bikie gang members. When discharged, she was admitted to an Ozcare Women’s Refuge.

Kelly became suicidal again, as she continued to have nightmares and flashbacks, and was terrified that the bikies would find her. Her worsening condition was exacerbated by Adam’s family’s refusal to allow her to communicate with Adam, as they blamed her for their son’s permanent brain damage injuries.

Kelly’s health is permanently affected, her marriage relationship is irreparably damaged and she has no contact with her daughter.

The impending court case will be a very dangerous time for Kelly and she still holds deep guilt for her husband’s condition. She was consequently referred to an acute psychiatric unit, where she still resides, and needs large doses of medication to cope.

Kelly is now on a security alert at the hospital, as someone has been phoning looking for her. Her name has been removed from all visible records. Even refuge staff are questioned before being allowed to visit her, however, gifts and flowers from them have assisted to lift Kelly’s spirits. Kelly is too afraid to return to her own home.
Opinion 1 — Nagging Thoughts and Damn Statistics Obscure a Homeless Free Vision?

By Adrian Pisarski,
CEO,
Queensland Shelter

A couple of nagging thoughts and some damn statistics dog my otherwise confident attitude that we finally have a chance to make serious inroads into the high level of people experiencing homelessness.

First, the statistics. The National Housing Supply Council’s 2010 “State of Supply” report identifies a current shortfall between the supply of housing and demand for it of 178,800 dwellings nationally. That is, we have nearly 180,000 too few dwellings to meet household need. In Queensland that will be about 36,000 dwellings needed but not available.

For renters things get worse. The same report identifies a shortage of 493,000 available and affordable rental properties for households in the bottom 40% of incomes. In Queensland, nearly 100,000 affordable rental properties need to be found to meet need.

It may seem strange that the affordable rental shortfall is higher than the overall shortfall, but most affordable rental in Australia is occupied by households in the top 60% income range and they rent down to maximise their saving or disposable income.

The net result of is that those on the lowest incomes and with the highest needs are the most likely to miss out or be squeezed out. This is why rent rises are at least triple general inflation and why vacancy rates in every major centre are low. If it’s harder than ever to house people who are, were or might be homeless, then this paints in some of the picture.

Next, the nagging thoughts. The main one is that we keep adding to the service system without redrawing the fundamental architecture, the plans for what it should look like and how it should operate. It’s like adding a room and then later knocking a hole in the wall to put in a door or window.

Do we have sufficient supports or resources to get it? Not just housing related supports, but to ensure that when we do house people they stay housed and have the opportunity to connect to a community. Will they have a home? Will they be connected to health care, education, employment, their local shops?

The new approach, “The Road Home” relies on providing greater opportunity to be housed and a more nuanced approach to appropriate support. I think this is the right approach, to provide a general opportunity for housing and specific support services in that housing. Up to now, people experiencing homelessness have either made a journey through a service system or not had a service at all. It has been a crisis led process.

Queensland has been transforming its response to homelessness, perhaps more dramatically than any other States in recent years. In both the community sector and government, new ways of thinking about and addressing homelessness have emerged.

They began with the Beattie Government’s announcement of the Responding to Homelessness package (R2H). They were turbo charged by the leadership and imprimatur of former P.M. and member for Griffith, the Hon Kevin Rudd and the commitment and massive funding boost to affordable housing by Treasurer Swan with the indefatigable oversight and engagement in the issue by Minister for Housing Tanya Plibersek.

On the community side we have seen the development of facilities like Roma House, supportive housing, the youth hub coordinators in schools, housing first approaches, the benefits of great networks on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts and a number of integrated youth and family services.

Queensland, historically, had a partially funded, partial response to the issue. Up to the R2H package Queensland had 24% of the population of people experiencing homelessness and only 14% of the federal funding, never enough beds, old style options and an over reliance on food vans and outreach.

Other states, particularly Victoria had undergone significant reforms over the many years of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program. But even if they had their share of the funding, no one can claim to have properly addressed the issue.

At the Federal level the Howard Government’s contribution was the development of reconnect for young people and family intervention.

The R2H package was a breakthrough. Instead of homelessness being the sole province of a single department of government it recognised the issue as multidimensional which required a multidimensional approach across a range of government and non government agencies.

The Queensland Government put $235.5m over four years on the table for new services, responses from Police, Attorney General’s, Health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Policy, Premier’s, Communities and Housing. It provided new outreach services, housing, engagement strategies, a homeless court, homeless hubs to help service integration, awareness from police about the issue and a focus on early intervention and prevention.

However, the new services were not always integrated with existing services and a sense...
Responding to Homelessness in Queensland

The Rudd Government’s election saw another strategy put in place at breakneck speed as State Governments scrambled to develop plans and implement services responding to the renewed Commonwealth interest.

The approach was part of a new National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) which also contained National Partnership Agreements on Social Housing, Remote Indigenous Housing, a new initiative to build low cost rental housing (The National Rental Affordability Scheme, NRAS) and the Housing Affordability Fund, to ease planning pressures on affordable housing. The central theme was halving homelessness, addressing the pointy end and targeting new social housing at people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

The new NAHA in Queensland will deliver $284.6 million over five years (2008–09 to 2012–13) for another new range of homelessness services, all of which will be welcome and will add significantly to the service system.

The largest injection of funding, however, came through the National Building and stimulus program. Initially $6.4b and later trimmed to $5.65b the stimulus boost will deliver 20,000 new fully subsidised units of housing. Most of the subsidy comes from government but a significant level comes in the form of land, borrowing and other contributions from States and the NGO sector including property brought to the scheme by churches and charities.

It will deliver an additional 4000 fully subsidised properties in Queensland and compliments the 10–12,000 properties for 10 years rented at up to 80% of market rent being delivered under NRAS.

But before we get over-excited about this massive injection, we should recall we are still playing catch up to the social housing levels we had in 1990 and would have now if we had maintained 1996 levels of investment. NRAS, stimulus and the NAHA will not make-up for the 11 years of neglect by the Howard Government.

One of the factors we need to consider is how the eligibility for housing and its tenant profile have changed in the past 25 years.

The Fraser and then Hawke Governments were the first to move us into a rationing system. They identified there were many more people on fixed low incomes following the massive levels of unemployment in the 70’s and 80’s and began a process of means testing, asset testing and targeting services to those in greatest need.

Targeting has become the overriding principle for housing allocation and has led to greater and greater concentrations of people with higher support needs. This in turn has undermined the acceptability of public housing partly because the support services have never been adequate.

Instead, support has been part of the supported accommodation or homelessness system and largely only available to clients of services at the crisis end and if they were fortunate, medium term part of the continuum.

So we are now broadening eligibility and allocation of housing assistance through a range of means, homeless services, private housing supports and subsidies, the National Rental Affordability Scheme and by growing social housing.

Subsequently, we also need to reshape support to more flexibly meet a continuum of needs across a range of housing options. We cannot rely on community housing providers to be both tenancy managers and support services or to spend on support services out of rental income.

We cannot expect support services to expand their current operations to meet the support needs of people in public and community housing without additional resourcing.

Yet in the allocation of new resources we have not increased funding to specialist homeless services to follow clients, to provide specialist advice to housing providers, to provide periodic or episodic support across a range of settings.

The new services are a necessary addition to the system but we have missed two crucial elements. The level at which demand is growing faster than supply and the level of support from a range of services to meet the higher needs of tenants.

If housing demand is growing faster than supply, then the pressure on families and individuals, already vulnerable, will increase. Their opportunities will diminish and the probability they will not find housing or support will grow.

It requires governments to commit to a long term growth strategy for affordable housing and to undertake the architecture essential to the orderly operation of the system. Growth must also provide broader options to avoid further concentrating communities of disadvantage.

Support also needs to be available in ways it has not previously been delivered. Currently, support comes packaged with the housing, receive the housing and you might also receive the support. But what if your support need is short and sharp or conversely small but long term, you may not get what you need.

The SAAP program has been unique to Australia and it has provided a service system catering for the most pressing homeless need. But as we better understand homelessness, as it affects families, seniors and is increasingly a result of an inability to access appropriate affordable housing, we need to change the way support is provided.

Our crisis services have always been under resourced to do the job they have been set and now there are more resources available for housing, we need to recalibrate the system.

We need the ability for specialist providers to add mental health expertise, drug and alcohol expertise, cultural expertise etc. Or we need housing providers to have the resources to purchase or access such expertise from those who have it at a greater scale than is currently the case.

Supports could come from a range of places. We know there is a critical shortage of mental health supports in the community. We know there is a shortage of dental services. We know that many people previously homeless still have drug and or alcohol issues and these services never reach far enough.

We have developed some new models to meet some of these needs, they are welcome and they will help but across the system there is still a long way to go.

If we are serious about the next phase of addressing our homelessness catastrophe we will find the resources to meet both the housing and support needs to address or at least drastically reduce our current levels of homelessness.
Opinion 2 — Homelessness is Not the Sole Responsibility of Funded “Specialist Homelessness Services”

By Jill Lang, Director, Queensland Council of Social Service

The standout feature of the vision in the 2008 White Paper on Homelessness The Road Home is its affirmation that homelessness is not just the responsibility of “SAAP” services — it is everybody’s business. Mainstream services like schools, health services, social housing providers, custodial care and justice systems have for too long complained that the homelessness services were not providing accommodation and or support to all their clients. But now the tables were to be turned. They too must carry responsibility and be part of the solution:

“The current response is not working. Mainstream services like schools, health services and employment programs often fail to help people who are homeless or who are at risk of homelessness.”


The SAAP funded services were never established to deliver sustainable long term outcomes for clients in the critical areas of housing, disability support, mental health care, employment, training and education.

The new system envisioned in the White Paper aims to ensure “no exits into homelessness from statutory, custodial care, health, mental health and drug and alcohol services”. The Commonwealth funding is to include an incentive system with additional funding linked to the achievement of outcomes for people who are homeless through mainstream services systems — schools, TAFE and universities, employment services, hospitals and health clinics, housing, and the justice system.

The State and Australian Governments were told that these services need to work with the newly named “specialist homelessness services” to provide a more connected and responsive solution to ending homelessness.

The White Paper suggested some interim targets for 2013:

• Number of people engaged in employment and/or education/training after presenting at specialist homelessness services is increased by 50%
• Number of people exiting care and custodial settings into homelessness is reduced by 25%, and
• The number of people exiting from social housing and private rental to homelessness is reduced by 25%

The Queensland Implementation Plan includes worthy intentions but no targets for mainstream services.

There has been a promising start:

• A new Queensland Homelessness Inter-sectoral Forum combines what was previously a separate Government Department “senior officers group” and a separate community sector group. It is a Forum where in theory joint problem solving can occur;
• Alongside investment in the community services sector, there is a swag of supplementary funding from the NPA to a number of Government Departments to enhance and highlight the role they must play. Some examples include:
  • $9m to State mental health outreach teams
  • The Department of Community Safety (Corrective Services) has an additional $6m to develop an integrated transitional support model and offender reintegration support service
  • The same department has $1.46m for through-care support services for offenders with impaired cognitive functioning
  • Four hospitals have been funding $1.6m to have a homelessness liaison officer connected to their emergency departments
  • Child Safety Services has an additional $33m to assist young people exiting from the care of the State and $4m for young people exiting out of home care
  • Disability Services receives $6m for young people with disabilities exiting the care of the State
  • There is $3.83m for a Special Circumstances Court Diversion program.
• As part of its normal business the recently amalgamated Department of Communities (disability service, housing, youth justice, child protection) has trialled new approaches which connect children and young people leaving care and people with disabilities to social housing and support. This is part of its “no wrong door” approach for departmental clients who would otherwise be potentially homeless;
• There is potential at the regional level for connections to be forged between government departments and the community sector through the joint community planning approach, and
• And two specific government/community sector service integration projects are to proceed in Brisbane and Townsville.

All of these projects have the potential to be the basis for a radically different service system in Queensland. But it is still not easy to see that system changes go beyond these disparate projects and become an essential part of the core business of these departments. That will be the challenge.

The Statewide Strategy to Reduce Homelessness is still in development. It is to be hoped that it will include targets such as the ones in the White Paper — the number of people exiting care and custodial settings into homelessness is reduced by 25%; or the number of people exiting from social housing and private rental to homelessness is reduced by 25%.

It is hoped that this Strategy will drive the changes to mainstream services that are so vitally needed. The will must be there so that all rough sleepers can be offered housing and with it the wrap around services such as health, social support and personal care by 2020. This will take a lot of planning, coordination and innovation.

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