



ending homelessness in
TASMANIA

Report to the Tasmanian Government

Rosanne Haggerty May 2008

Ending Homelessness in Tasmania
Report to the Tasmanian Government
Prepared by Rosanne Haggerty
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Social Inclusion Unit
Department of Premier and Cabinet
GPO Box 123 Hobart, TAS 7001
Phone: 03 6233 9953
Fax: 03 6233 9676
Email: SIU@dpac.tas.gov.au

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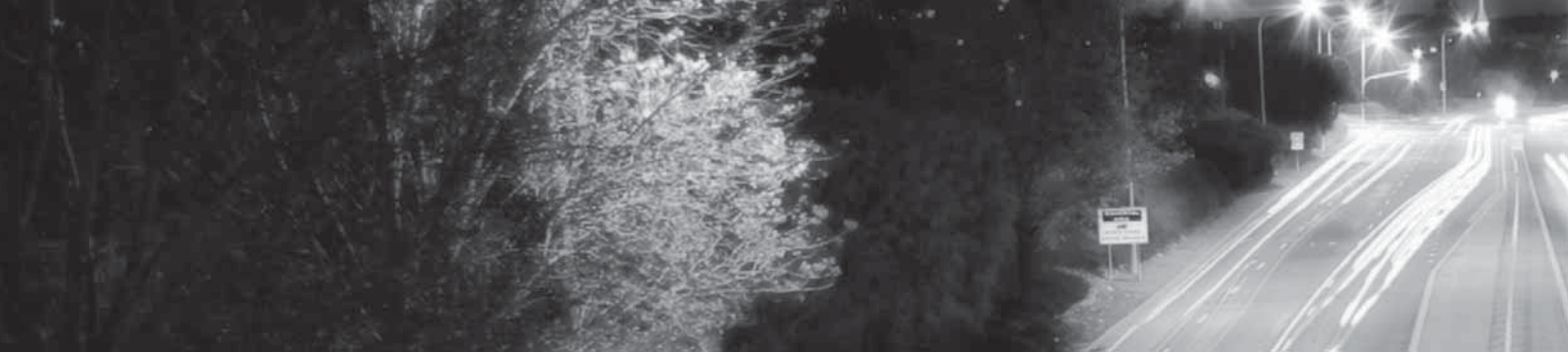
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About the author



ROSANNE HAGGERTY **Founder and President** **Common Ground**

Rosanne Haggerty is the founder and president of Common Ground, a New York City non-profit housing and community development organisation dedicated to ending homelessness. Ms Haggerty founded Common Ground in 1990 to preserve and transform the bankrupt and decrepit Times Square Hotel into the nation's largest supportive housing residence.

Building on its success, Common Ground similarly purchased and developed other distressed properties in New York and Connecticut to provide affordable housing with community supports for the homeless, lower wage workers and others seeking vibrant, inclusive and affordable communities. Common Ground is currently developing seven properties in New York City and Connecticut, including a new 200-unit supportive housing building in downtown Brooklyn in collaboration with The Actors' Fund.

Common Ground has also grown to be the largest provider of street outreach services in the United

States, and works with communities to reduce street homelessness by linking those living on the streets, particularly the most vulnerable, with long term housing and assistance.

The organisation has now expanded beyond New York City, and is working with local partners across North America and the globe to replicate its work.

A key component of Common Ground's approach to homelessness is the establishment of ancillary services at its residences, including job training and placement programs, mental health, substance abuse service, health care services, computer access and arts facilities to assist tenants in rebuilding their lives and leaving homelessness behind.

In the eighteen years since its inception, Ms Haggerty has built Common Ground into a \$23 million organisation that provides housing for over 2,000 tenants and operates businesses and employment projects to assist tenants in returning to the work force. It has also taken its housing and economic development approach to homelessness at a neighborhood scale in Brownsville, Brooklyn where the "Brownsville Partnership" works to prevent homelessness by strengthening the health and skills of local residents and the entire community.

Common Ground's work has been recognised by the Peter Drucker Award for Non-Profit Innovation, the Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence, the United Nations' World Habitat Award and has been featured on "60 Minutes" and the BBC.

Prior to founding Common Ground, Ms Haggerty held the position of Coordinator of Housing Development at Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens. She is a graduate of Amherst College. Ms Haggerty is a Director of Quest Diagnostics, and a Board Member of New York City's Citizens Housing & Planning Council, the Center for Urban Community Services, and the Times Square Alliance. She is a member of the New York Executive Committee of the Urban Land Institute, where she serves as an Urban Advisor. She is a Life Trustee of Amherst College. Ms Haggerty was a 2000 Japan Society Public Policy Fellow, and from 2005-2006 was an Adelaide (South Australia) Thinker in Residence. She was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship in 2001 and is an Ashoka Senior Fellow.



Executive summary

“Let me commend all who have made ending homelessness in Tasmania a priority. When comparing homelessness in Tasmania with homelessness in American communities, or with other States and Territories within Australia, the numbers of those experiencing homelessness are not great, nor overwhelming. Ending homelessness is a solvable problem. The keen sense of community that exists in Tasmania, and the deeply felt ties that Tasmanians feel for each other, are very evident. It is this spirit of mutual concern, neighbourliness, and belief that a stable home is necessary to have a fair chance at a life of stability and contribution that can animate a successful whole-of-community response to homelessness in Tasmania.”

Rosanne Haggerty

Rosanne Haggerty's report to the Premier of Tasmania, Paul Lennon MP contains her observations during her visit to Tasmania from 16 -18 March 2008. Rosanne visited emergency housing facilities in the north and south of the State and met with government, business and community leaders including people who work every day to help homeless Tasmanians. The report contains her advice about innovative solutions to homelessness in the Tasmanian context.

Building more public housing and reducing homelessness is one of the Tasmanian Government's eight core priorities outlined in The Premier's opening address to the Tasmanian Parliament, *Preparing Tasmania for Tomorrow: Agenda 2008*. *Agenda 2008* outlined the establishment of a Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet with the immediate priorities of developing a whole-of-

government Social Inclusion Strategy, and addressing the first key references made by the Premier to the Unit: homelessness and literacy.

Agenda 2008 sets out an action plan and criteria for achievement against which the Government will be measured. The Premier has committed the Government to establishing a benchmark figure for primary homelessness by 30 June 2008 and to halve that figure by 2010.

To achieve this goal, the Government is combining the best of local thinking with solutions from interstate and overseas to deliver practical results in the Tasmanian community.

In the United States, in South Australia, and in Great Britain, which achieved significant progress in reducing homelessness beginning in 1997, there are the same seven elements in successful plans to reduce homelessness. This report suggests that this seven part approach should form the basis of a Tasmanian plan to end homelessness.

1. *Redefine the problem:* Solve, don't manage homelessness
2. *Research and develop data:* Insist on and be guided by evidence of results
3. *Recruit jurisdictional leadership:* Gain support, commitment and action from the top down, and engage those with the ability to determine and implement policy
4. *Replicate innovation:* Pursue unconventional thinking, learn from the leaders, deploy proven strategies
5. *Realign resources:* Shift focus and funds from ad hoc responses to long- term problem solving
6. *Report results:* Be an ambassador for effectiveness; rally support based on quantifiable success
7. *Reinvest in the community:* Put the costs saved by this approach to work in other areas of need





Recommendations

To move quickly to record results and to put the State on a path to achieve its ambitious and important goals, this report recommends the following steps. The recommendations build on the practices that are achieving results in other communities and are adapted to the unique context and opportunities that exist in Tasmania.

1) Create a targeted approach

First and foremost, it is important that individuals with the most complex issues and greatest needs are identified and prioritised for help. The first step in delivering effective - and cost effective - help to the most vulnerable homeless is to determine who they are and what specifically each individual or family will require to establish a stable situation.

2) Build a whole-of-community response

Homelessness is everybody's responsibility and the response requires all sectors of the Tasmanian community to work together. Business, not-for-profit, religious, education, healthcare and government representatives must work together to shape an overall plan for Tasmania and champion its implementation.

3) Build a whole-of-government response

Ending homelessness will require a whole-of-government focus, coordinated service delivery and pooling of resources across agency lines to successfully serve homeless Tasmanians. It is a singular opportunity to overcome the 'silos' that isolate services categorically as 'health' or 'mental health' or 'Supported Accommodation Assistance Program' (SAAP), and to recognise the participation of homeless people in all these systems.

4) Create a range of public housing opportunities

For Tasmania to make bold steps in ending homelessness, a three-part housing strategy should be considered:

- a. **Develop new housing options:** An iconic project, such as that proposed for Highfield House, will be a powerful symbol of Tasmania's new direction on homelessness and social inclusion.
- b. **Expand and repurpose existing facilities:** Expand or repurpose the operations of existing programs to make supportive housing

arrangements available to homeless people.

- c. **Scatter site housing:** Engage landlords and brokers in identifying ways for homeless Tasmanians to access affordable rental housing.

5) Homeless youth

A particular focus on youth homelessness is merited, with attention to how to connect young people with the new employment opportunities created by Tasmania's economic expansion. Stable, public housing arrangements for homeless young people are also needed as an alternative to dependence on transitional SAAP funded accommodation.

6) Employment

The best protection against homelessness is a job. It is a skill gap that separates the most needy Tasmanians from participating in the jobs being created by Tasmania's economic growth. A comprehensive training and employment strategy for the most marginalised Tasmanians will be an important component of a successful effort to end homelessness.

7) Preventing homelessness

The transition from foster care, mental health institutions, correctional facilities and hospitals is often the moment that an individual becomes vulnerable to homelessness. There is also a geographic dimension to homelessness. Communities of concentrated poverty and disadvantage are the places where housing arrangements frequently unravel. Consider initiatives in high-need communities and work on an individual and family basis to reduce homelessness.

8) Communication

A whole-of-community effort to end homelessness in Tasmania will require a complementary communications strategy. For the community at large to shift its beliefs about homelessness, and understand that it is a solvable problem, regular messaging about the plan will be essential.

9) Leadership

What separates communities that make progress in ending homelessness from communities that don't is whether the jurisdictional leader is committed to the effort. In Tasmania, the Premier Paul Lennon has initiated the effort to end homelessness and this bodes very well for achieving success.



Context

Tasmania has announced the ambitious goal of reducing primary homelessness in the State by 50% by 2010. This comes as part of the State's newly announced social inclusion initiative to bring new and proven strategies to improving the lives of Tasmania's most disadvantaged citizens.

Homelessness, and particularly 'rough sleeping' or 'primary homelessness' as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is of particular concern to all Tasmanians. Individuals who are without basic shelter challenge the conscience of the entire community. Also, those individuals, and sometimes families as well, who live in a permanent state of instability, moving from one short term arrangement or from one shelter or institution to the next, are unable to participate fully in the community or to contribute in a positive way.

To give these vulnerable Tasmanians a solid chance at a fair go, the State government has pledged a \$60 million investment in public housing. No one overcomes homelessness without a stable home. Yet because in Tasmania and elsewhere, reducing homelessness has often proven to require more than simply an addition to the supply of public housing in a community, the State government seeks to introduce a more comprehensive strategy to see that the goal of dramatically reducing primary homelessness is met.

I was privileged to visit Tasmania from March 16-18 2008 to advise on the creation of the government's strategy. My work for the past 25 years has involved creating and operating initiatives to reduce homelessness in the United States, and in advising government initiatives on homelessness in other countries. Since 2005, this has brought me to Australia, where I have advised South Australia on their strategy to reduce homelessness, which has shown successful results.

In Tasmania, I met with many of those now responding to homelessness in Launceston and the Hobart area. I met with government officials, those in the non-government organisation (NGO) sector operating services for the homeless, and some individuals who were homeless themselves and making use of existing services. This introduction to the current infrastructure

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of services was essential to my understanding the needs of homeless Tasmanians and the immediate opportunities to introduce transformative practices that when implemented in other communities have resulted in reduced homelessness.

My recommendations are based on my observations of the current environment of homeless services and how the strategic framework for solving homelessness that has emerged in the United States can be applied in the Tasmanian context.

I am grateful for the chance to participate in this effort to see that Tasmanians who are most excluded from the community's mainstream are given a new chance at a fair go and a life of stability and contribution.





Background

Since 2000, homelessness has changed dramatically in the United States. Until that time, most services were of an emergency nature: shelters or short term crisis assistance. The numbers of those experiencing homelessness was increasing. The conversation among those working on the issue was focused on securing more emergency resources to cope with the growing numbers of homeless individuals and families. But in 2000, a new chapter in homelessness began. Research had emerged that revealed the dynamics of homelessness in a new way. Certain practices, such as supportive housing, were demonstrating that homelessness could be ended at a fraction of the cost of what government and philanthropy was spending to maintain people in shelters or short term accommodation. Thus, with the arrival of the new millennium, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, representing the service sector in America, challenged the country to a new vision: to end chronic homelessness within a decade.

It was the first time in memory that the notion of 'ending' homelessness was raised, and it resonated powerfully. After years of becoming accustomed to homelessness, communities and the homeless services sector were pushed to think about the issue strategically, to examine the effectiveness of housing rather than shelter as an intervention, and to begin measuring the impact of publicly funded services against the goal of how effective they were in ending, not managing, peoples' homelessness. The call to action was reinforced with the appointment of a new head of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. He recognised that ending homelessness could not be accomplished by central government, nor by service providers or faith based organisations alone, but would require a whole-of-community response. The Council and National Alliance together encouraged local communities to bring together business, government and NGO leaders to develop a local plan to end homelessness. There are now over 325 communities in the United States implementing their own locally designed plans to end homelessness. Communities of all sizes, from small towns in North Carolina to New York City, and 49 of 50



states, have implemented plans. Over 40 communities are already seeing significant declines in homelessness as the result of these efforts.

The process of engaging the whole-of-community in changing course on homelessness has had other benefits. The experience of working across sectors to solve a complex challenge and create a fairer environment for the most excluded strengthens communities: it builds relationships and capabilities that serve the community in ways beyond the mission of ending homelessness.



Planning to reduce and end homelessness

Tasmania is beginning its work to reduce and ultimately end homelessness at a pivotal moment. The new Federal Government in Australia has made ending homelessness one of its priorities, and has promised new resources, and a reform of existing services. Also, it can draw on the proven experience of other communities and their successful strategies. South Australia's efforts are notable and offer important guidance in an Australian context. The experience of communities in the United States offers further direction as to the elements of successful strategies to end homelessness.

In the United States, in South Australia, and in Great Britain, which have achieved significant progress in reducing homelessness beginning in 1997, one sees the same seven elements in successful plans to reduce homelessness. In the United States, we have adopted a framework for describing them. This seven part approach should form the basis of Tasmania's plan.

- › *Redefine the problem:* Solve, don't manage homelessness
- › *Research and develop data:* Insist on and be guided by evidence of results
- › *Recruit jurisdictional leadership:* Gain support, commitment and action from the top down, and engage those with the ability to determine and implement policy
- › *Replicate innovation:* Pursue unconventional thinking, learn from the leaders, deploy proven strategies
- › *Realign resources:* Shift focus and funds from ad hoc responses to long- term problem solving
- › *Report results:* Be an ambassador for effectiveness; rally support based on quantifiable success
- › *Reinvest in the community:* Put the costs saved by this approach to work in other areas of need

How might these principles be adapted to a Tasmanian context?

Redefining homelessness

Tasmania has already committed itself to a leadership role in redefining homelessness as a solvable problem. The State has signaled, powerfully, its intention to reduce primary homelessness among Tasmanians and to do so rapidly, as a priority of the new Social Inclusion Unit established by Premier Paul Lennon earlier this year. The task will require a whole-of-community effort, which is already being put in place.

A key dimension of redefining homelessness as solvable is putting in place a coherent system to reduce incidents of homelessness. Critical to implementing such a system will be the resolve of government to adjust its practices where needed to achieve this outcome, the support of landlords, employers and citizens throughout the State, and the commitment of not-for-profit and faith based providers of services to the homeless, who will be faced with the need to adapt their existing efforts and to move beyond the provision of emergency and transitional assistance.

Tasmanian not-for-profit and faith based organisations have developed many humane and well operated programs for homeless young people, families and adults. Visits to the Northern Youth Shelter, in Launceston, and to Bethlehem House and McCombe House, in Hobart, for example, illustrated the very high standard of transitional services and staff dedicated to the homeless in the State, and the investment of government in the provision of quality temporary accommodations. The recently renovated Indigo Lodge in Launceston and the thoughtfully designed Anglicare Youthcare Shelter in Hobart also reflected the ongoing attention to facilities, to helpful programming, and a sensitivity to neighbourhood context. To a degree I have seen in few places, Tasmania has been successful in incorporating services for the homeless into neighborhoods and has provided respectful and pleasant facilities operated by caring, professional staff.

Wherever I visited, however, staff though rightly proud of the caring work going on in their programs, acknowledged that short term accommodation was not enough. The growing scarcity of affordable housing has made more people reliant on emergency services who, in the past, supported themselves.





Without increased public housing and job links they are unable to transition to a place of their own. And for a particularly vulnerable group - those with health, mental health and/or substance abuse challenges - more than public housing will be needed to enable them to establish a stable life in the community. This group has moved from place to place, emergency program to emergency program, and will continue to without specific and comprehensive assistance that links a stable, affordable home with the social, medical, employment and other assistance that they need.

In my conversations with service providers, many seemed ready to take on a new role as providers of supportive housing for those with the most complex needs, and to adapt their services to support the vision of reducing and ultimately ending homelessness. Some existing transitional facilities, such as Indigo Lodge, could be reconfigured and become supportive housing. One provider, Bethlehem House, has already begun extending its work outside its main location to support men in living independently in the community. They also have the capacity and experience to support additional satellite residences.

The Anglicare network of services, and those supported by the Catholic Church, are particularly well positioned to play a Statewide role in the shift from emergency services, to a more nuanced system of assistance. For example, in addition to creating supportive housing for the most vulnerable homeless, communities in the United States that have seen the most pronounced decreases in homelessness have created homelessness prevention services as well. These are services designed

to intervene before an individual or family loses their housing. In cases where a one time financial setback or crisis has placed a household at risk of homelessness, flexible, easy to access assistance can pre-empt a catastrophe. Homelessness prevention services can also serve as links to employers and landlords on behalf of those facing a crisis with their housing, and offer the comprehensive problem solving help that can enable a family or individual to avoid homelessness by drawing on the resources of the whole community.

For those who experience homelessness as the result of an economic crisis, and who require both public housing and a job, the State's new investment in public housing will be of critical importance to creating pathways from homelessness for this group. The announcement of new federal resources for housing will further expand the supply of desperately needed public housing in Tasmania.

A major opportunity exists with respect to employment, as well, with the expansion of the Tasmanian economy. The skill deficit faced by employers in growth industry areas, and the current mismatch between the skills needed for many new jobs and the capabilities of homeless and lower income Tasmanians, is an opportunity and challenge that is recognised by government. Redefining homelessness means also that issues of employment training and linkages to work be recognised as part of the State's strategy.

Not every experience of homelessness can be prevented, nor will every individual or family's challenges be overcome by the same set of interventions. Yet a new infrastructure of services to prevent homelessness whenever possible; to make public housing and employment more accessible to those who are economically homeless; and to provide supportive housing for those with the most complex needs are the core elements of a strategy that redefines homelessness as solvable.



Research and data

Solving homelessness begins with knowing specifically who is homeless and the particular facts of their situation. In communities everywhere, a similar pattern has been found: the great majority of those who experience homelessness are confronted with a short term crisis, but 15-20% of the homeless are trapped in a permanent state of social exclusion. This group has typically been homeless or unstably housed for years, and struggles with health, mental health and/or substance abuse in addition to needing public housing and a supportive community. This group, described as the 'primary' homeless by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is often known by multiple agencies and frequently has had significant contact with hospitals, jails and other public institutions.

To match the needed, comprehensive assistance with those who need it most, government and not-for-profit agencies must create ways of sharing information within the bounds of privacy laws and concerns. First, those implementing plans to reduce and end homelessness must identify the primary homeless in order to prioritise them for housing and comprehensive assistance. Chances are that service providers, hospitals and others in the community will know who these individuals are. It is important also to construct data systems that will identify those whose regular use of shelter services, or the hospital, or detox services indicate a pattern of dependence and instability.

Common Ground has developed a range of practices that help us to identify those in most urgent need of housing. We conduct twice annual 'street counts' to determine where individuals are sleeping in public places, and to measure increases/reductions in that trend; we utilise a 'vulnerability index' that captures degrees of health risk that individuals face in remaining homeless, and use these results to prioritise the most vulnerable for housing. We developed a client release form that addresses confidentiality concerns and enables us to speak with government and other service agencies on an individual's behalf in order to help them into housing. We created a 'registry' of those living on the street or other vulnerable places to monitor the overall dimension of the challenge we are working to solve and to track our progress in engaging and placing each individual in housing. Some of these methods

could prove useful in Tasmania as well, as managing information effectively is critical to a successful effort to reduce and end homelessness in a community.

It is also essential to root one's strategy in research and data on effective program models. There is abundant evidence now showing the efficacy of the 'housing first' approach to homelessness: the practice of getting an individual into housing as a first step, then working with him/her in their home to address the health, mental health, employment or other issues that require support. Using evidence-based practices to guide policy is characteristic of communities that are successful in reducing homelessness.

Recruiting jurisdictional leadership

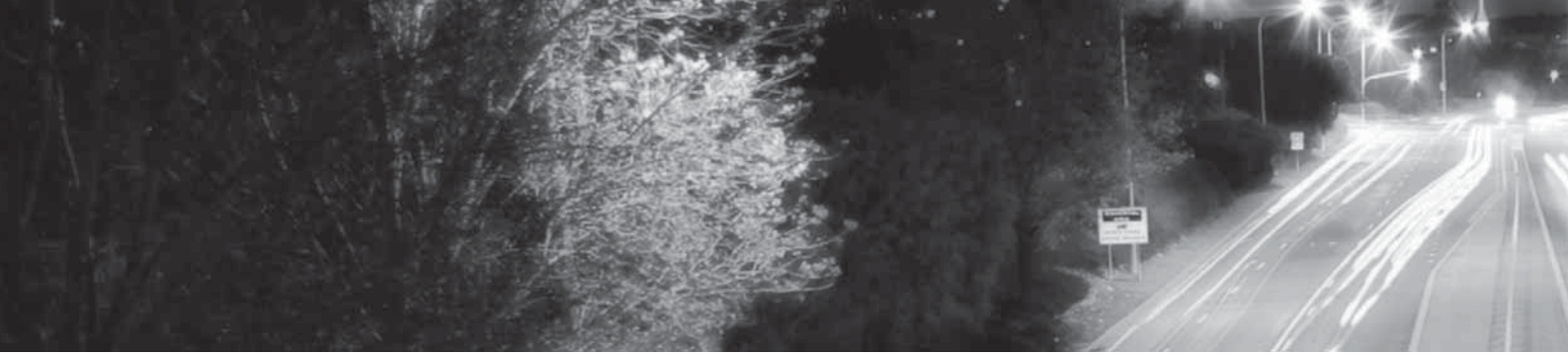
Tasmania is fortunate in that Premier Paul Lennon, supported by Minister Lara Giddings, has made reducing and ending homelessness a personal priority. It is this type of leadership that more than any other factor determines the success of a community's efforts.

While the commitment of the jurisdictional leader to the goal is critical, it is also necessary to engage community stakeholders, from the business as well as the not for profit community, to accomplish the task. In Adelaide, for example, a prominent property developer, Theo Maras, has chaired the effort to build supportive housing.

Similarly, in a number of American communities business leaders have chaired planning committees that assessed the magnitude of local needs and established five to ten year plans to eliminate homelessness in their communities. These 'plans to end homelessness' have been an important vehicle for bringing all sectors of the community together around an overall plan of action, and to identify the resources that will be needed to achieve success. Tasmania's Stronger Communities Taskforce and *The State of Our Community Report 2007* is a model of this kind of effort.

Over 325 American communities are now developing or implementing local plans to end homelessness. Some that might be of particular interest to Tasmania are those of Alabama, Maine and Utah, all states with smaller, widely dispersed populations. These plans are available at www.naeh.org/section/tools//community_plans





Replicating innovation

Substantial evidence exists of what works to end homelessness. Innovative programs that prevent and end homelessness are now widely practiced and should form the basis of Tasmania's strategy.

Several of these innovations have been mentioned earlier in this report: supportive housing, which links public housing to support services to enable households to succeed in their homes and communities; 'housing first', or the practice of first connecting a household with a home, then providing the support needed to help them to succeed, and prevention initiatives to assist struggling households to maintain their home or secure an alternative home before they become homeless.

Among the other innovations that are producing effective results are the Street to Home approach to street outreach, which connects those living on the street with housing; the Vulnerability Index, which calculates health risks among the homeless in order to set housing priorities; and the use of 'assertive community treatment' (ACT) mental health teams to provide support in housing to those with serious mental health needs. There is also innovation in the forms of supportive housing that have been created, including housing for young people who are leaving authority care or already homeless (one model is the *foyer*), and housing designed for 'chronic inebriates' that assists homeless individuals with long standing alcohol addictions in improving their health, which combined with stable housing, frequently leads to reductions in alcohol consumption.

There are now a number of effective innovations that are achieving results in ending and preventing homelessness. Common Ground has developed several of them, and has adapted effective innovations developed by others. South Australia has adopted two Common Ground innovations: mixed income supportive housing, and the *Street to Home* program that reduces street homelessness by assisting the homeless off the street and directly into a home. They have created impressive innovations of their own that merit replication. Among them is the 'Exceptional Needs Unit', which focuses on the chronic homeless

who are well known to many government systems and community service providers, and develops personalised housing and support packages for each individual in the program. Also, South Australia has stationed linkage workers in Adelaide's major downtown hospital, to assist homeless patients in finding housing, and at its City Watch House.

Realigning resources

As communities realise how much is being spent on maintaining people in homelessness, rather than on helping them to overcome homelessness with housing and the supports that enable people to build a life, the need to realign resources becomes obvious. Most communities require new resources to create more public housing, and to enable a period of transition to a housing-focused service system. Strikingly, however, much of the progress being made to end homelessness has relied on spending existing resources more effectively.

Realigning government and charitable funding to invest in solutions to homelessness rather than the status quo will require new forms of collaboration between government agencies, to pool resources around vulnerable individuals and families who encounter many different government agencies. For example, many homeless individuals require health, mental health and substance abuse services. Providing integrated services that meet all those needs will require integrated funding. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is another case in point. If SAAP funds were realigned to support vulnerable people in their own homes, those individuals would not need to rely on SAAP-funded shelters or transitional housing.

Just as communities cannot maintain a generalised approach to homelessness and hope to reduce and end homelessness, communities cannot maintain an array of emergency oriented, non integrated programs or services that are unable to meet the range of an individual or family's needs in a coherent way. Making resources match the objectives of ending and preventing homelessness is a vital step in an effective community plan to end homelessness.



Reporting results

To mobilise and sustain a whole-of-community response to reducing and ending homelessness, the community must understand and plan the ways that each member of the community can support it, and be regularly informed of progress. Communicating regularly about successes, challenges, and important developments builds interest and investment. In the most successful communities, the jurisdictional leader personally participates in announcing progress and in marking important events.

Events that the community can participate in are important to consider. Beginning in San Francisco, a program called 'Project Homeless Connect' has now spread to over one hundred other cities. This involves a one day, 'one-stop-shop' for the homeless: medical and employment services, housing, a place to sort out government benefits, a phone bank so that individuals can connect with family, even haircuts. These events are staffed by volunteers and have been effective both in linking the homeless to the help they need to overcome homelessness and in giving the community a way to participate in reducing and ending homelessness.

Many communities have found that their efforts to end homelessness create a model for approaching other issues of community-wide importance, and bring the community together in ways that create significant unanticipated benefits. Those from different sectors come to know each other: schools, churches, businesses and neighborhood groups see how they each can contribute to reaching a community-wide goal. These benefits are only realised, however, if there is a strong communications program in place to keep the plan to reduce and end homelessness regularly in the public mind. Denver has done an exemplary job here, creating a campaign website, www.denversroadhome.org, and publishing an annual report card highlighting their progress.

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Reinvesting in the community

To fully eradicate homelessness, our communities must be more inclusive places where those who are vulnerable, those struggling economically or with health or addiction problems, and those who are without family support can find the help they need before falling through the cracks into homelessness. At the very least, our communities must offer a wide enough range of housing options that a basic safe and affordable place to live is within everyone's means. This may sound idealistic, but recent history has demonstrated that the absence of this basic stability has serious and costly implications for public health and economic participation.

There is innovative work being undertaken by a range of contemporary design companies, architects and the University of Tasmania. Encouraging innovative efforts to create new types of accommodation or living arrangements to meet the housing needs of all Tasmanians is part of a whole-of-community effort to end and prevent homelessness.

Reinvesting in the community is to put the cost saved by innovation and homelessness prevention to work in other areas of community need.





Recommendations

Tasmania has made reducing and ending homelessness a social policy priority. It is taking a leadership role in what is also becoming a priority of the new Federal government. To move quickly to record results and to put the State on a path to achieve its ambitious and important goals, I recommend the following steps. The recommendations build on the practices that are achieving results in other communities adapted to the unique context and opportunities that exist in Tasmania.

- 1. Create a targeted approach.** First and foremost, it is important that individuals with the most complex issues and greatest needs are identified and prioritised for help. Too often, those who are struggling the most find themselves moving between one emergency system and the next, never getting the focused, comprehensive assistance they need. In my visits to programs in Tasmania, staff at various SAAP funded programs described individuals they have known for years, who move between one emergency service and the other, never receiving the comprehensive help they require to establish a stable situation. These are the individuals and families who frustrate individual programs because their needs are typically more extensive and varied than one agency alone can address. The first step in delivering effective - and cost effective - help to the most vulnerable homeless is to determine who they are and what specifically each individual or family will require to establish a stable situation. This process will require the collaboration of health, mental health and corrections agencies, Centrelink, community organisations, and the vulnerable homeless themselves. We have found that those suffering the longest in homelessness are generally quite prepared to provide releases to agencies allowing them to exchange information if everyone is working together toward the goal of stable housing.

Beginning with Tasmania's primary homeless - however they can be identified eg. whether through SAAP providers or government agencies - the creation of a targeted approach that identifies

individuals with the most complex needs first will enable the State to establish a baseline number of those needing assistance that can guide program development efforts. It will also enable Tasmania to measure progress in reaching its goal of dramatically reducing 'rough sleeping' by 2010.

In addition to SAAP providers, it is generally the case that the healthcare system regularly encounters individuals who are homeless and whose health has been compromised by their lifestyle. This group must also be taken into account while constructing the targeted approach that identifies individuals with the most complex needs first, as they may not be linked into SAAP services.

Another benefit of a disciplined focus on those in greatest need of housing is that it will illustrate that the problem of primary homelessness is quite solvable. In most communities, the homeless represent roughly one percent of the population. The primary/chronic homeless represent just 10-20 percent of this group. Though many more individuals and families - those considered to be secondary or tertiary homeless - will need assistance with finding and maintaining public housing, those primary homeless with significant challenges in addition to housing are a relatively small group.

Having identified those in need through a system-wide information gathering approach, it is important to prioritise those who are the most ill or vulnerable using tools such as the Vulnerability Index developed by Common Ground and others. This assigns a score to individuals based on a survey of their self reported health status, age and length of homelessness so that the most frail will be linked to housing first.

A targeted approach that identifies individuals with the most complex needs first, and the process of integrating data systems across agencies that regularly encounter the homeless, will not only impact existing rates of homelessness, it will also lay the foundation for preventing homelessness in Tasmania. Those transitioning from institutional settings who lack family support or the means to provide their own housing are vulnerable to



homelessness. With an integrated data system, it will be possible to link information on housing needs with housing resources and to make establishing housing linkages part of the discharge planning process from all institutional systems such as corrections, child welfare and mental health. Successful transitions from institutional settings into independent housing will prevent future homelessness. Again, a privacy-protected data management system that flags those in need of housing will protect vulnerable people from falling through the cracks into homelessness.

- 2. Building a whole-of-community response.** During my visit it was abundantly clear that Tasmanians from all sectors are eager to see homelessness ended, and are prepared to participate in a whole-of-community plan. To shape and advise on a Tasmanian effort to end homelessness, Premier Lennon and the Social Inclusion Unit should bring together representatives of the business, not for profit, religious, education, healthcare and government sectors to shape an overall plan for Tasmania and to champion its implementation. This need not be a lengthy endeavor. Many of the necessary steps and opportunities will be clear. This process need not wait for the targeted approach that identifies individuals with the most complex needs, or for a new data management system to be completed: the group should begin with as much data on homelessness in Tasmania as is available right now and anticipate that it will be further developed and refined.

There are many benefits of such a process. It will create a common understanding of homelessness in Tasmania, its scope and the challenges of ending it, that can be shared by the whole community. Roles for various sectors in implementing the plan can be determined. For example, churches have played a significant role in many American communities by specifically 'adopting' a homeless individual or family and assisting them in finding a new home, in welcoming them to a new community, and providing mentoring and support around work. Business leaders involved in the Common Ground Adelaide initiative have contributed their expertise to acquiring and

developing two new supportive housing residences in South Australia in record time.

A plan can take into account the roles of local communities and of the federal government. Universities, employers and hospitals all have important contributions to make in ending homelessness in Tasmania and can be inspired and coordinated through a an inclusive plan which articulates the community's challenge and intended course of action. A plan will also lay the groundwork for communicating with - and engaging - all Tasmanians in the effort to end homelessness in your community.

A good plan will make the business case for ending homelessness, and include specific targets and ways of measuring progress. These targets and benchmarks should be reported on regularly to strengthen the community's participation and investment in the effort.

- 3. Building a whole-of-government response:** Implementing an effective plan to end homelessness will require using existing resources in a more targeted and flexible way. SAAP funding, healthcare resources and mental health services all should be considered as tools for providing the housing support and coordinated services that vulnerable homeless people will need to get back on their feet.

The reality that existing services must change in order to deliver more effective results has often involved some friction in communities. The temptation is to call for new resources rather than question the effectiveness of existing approaches and whether they should continue unchanged. Yet other communities have found that to achieve more effective results – like stable homes and healthier, more productive lives for homeless people - the services themselves, and where resources are invested, must be transformed.

SAAP reform has been a Federal level initiative, and as a result, Tasmania and other States and Territories now have greater flexibility in electing what services - permanent or emergency - can receive SAAP support. Health, mental health and





substance abuse services may not now align with housing, or not be designed to target high need populations. The flexibility to innovate, and to repurpose existing resources has been a feature of those communities that have made significant progress in housing vulnerable homeless people.

It has also been beneficial for the organisations and systems that have had to accommodate shifts in resources or ways of working. Not for profit service providers, hospitals and behavioural health services, have seen many of their most complex and difficult clients become more stable, amenable to intervention and less costly to serve as the result of these shifts.

Ending homelessness will require a whole-of-government focus, as many programs and budgets are involved in serving the homeless and must participate in the transformation of the State's approach. It is a singular opportunity to overcome the 'silos' that isolate services categorically as 'health' or 'mental health' or 'SAAP', and to recognise the involvement of homeless people in all these systems. The need, and opportunity, is to move away from emergency services as the dominant response to homeless people, and to pool resources across agency lines to end the homelessness of vulnerable Tasmanians.

The whole-of-government effort must logically extend throughout other areas of State concern as well. Housing and planning policies, employment and training initiatives, and corrections policies directly impact homelessness. Fortunately, in each area there are ways to link to and support the work of ending homelessness. A great value in having created the Social Inclusion Unit is that there is now a place where opportunities to end homelessness can be identified and coordinated across agencies. The effort to end homelessness cannot be successful if seen as an isolated initiative. It must be recognised and championed as a whole-of-government commitment.

4. Create a range of public housing opportunities:

Premier Lennon's commitment of \$60 million new public housing resources, coupled with plans by the Federal government to make new

investments in housing, offers a remarkable opportunity to not only add to the supply of public housing in Tasmania, but to create new types of housing and housing arrangements so that all Tasmanians can count on having a home. Housing arrangements that have proven successful for homeless individuals, such as supportive housing, which combines affordable apartments with health, mental health and employment assistance as needed, have surprisingly proven to be helpful to many other groups. Seniors and those with health concerns, young people living on their own for the first time, lower wage workers, and single parents in need of support - many people in our communities - benefit from housing options that while providing independence and affordability also provide a supportive community and access to help when it is needed.

Supportive housing in America has taken several forms. It has been most successful, in my view, when it is integrated into the surrounding neighborhood, and includes not just individuals recovering from homelessness but is open to low wage workers, artists, and seniors - the range of people in a community who could benefit from a less anonymous, less costly, more connected and supported living arrangement. Common Ground typically reserves 50-60% of the apartments in any of our buildings for those recovering from long term homelessness, and dedicates the rest to people of limited means from the wider community.

Among the features that have made these buildings successful are their thoughtful and attractive design, the easy connection to health, mental health and employment services and attentive property management. This includes a 24 hour staff presence to assure that entry to the property is supervised, and that anyone in need, at anytime of day or night, receives a quick response.

From a physical standpoint, supportive housing has been particularly innovative. Common Ground and others have developed buildings that cater to the elderly homeless, buildings that cater to youth, buildings that cater to those moving right



from the street into housing, and to families of various income ranges and needs. Our buildings are also now designed to be 'green', and incorporate environmentally sustainable systems and materials.

The scales and styles of buildings vary to match their context: one initiative of ours, in collaboration with Yale University's School of Architecture in New Haven, Connecticut, produces a small home each year for a disabled veteran with urgent housing needs. Another initiative involves building hundreds of homes in apartment-style buildings in a dense New York City neighborhood where each year, many families and individuals now fall through the cracks into homelessness.

Some supportive housing does not require creating new housing, but new services. 'Scatter site' supportive housing is an approach where a not for profit or government agency leases existing apartments on behalf of a homeless household, then provides a visiting support worker or team of workers to assist individuals or families in maintaining their housing and addressing other challenges. Communities planning to end homelessness find that a scatter site supportive housing program is a valuable component of their plan, because no construction or rehabilitation of property is required allowing it to be put quickly into place.

For Tasmania to make bold steps in ending homelessness, a three part housing strategy should be considered:

- › Develop new housing options: An iconic project, such as that proposed for Highfield House, will be a powerful symbol of Tasmania's new direction on homelessness and Social Inclusion. The preservation of this important Heritage building will be a perfect demonstration of the whole-of-community benefits of tackling homelessness with resolve and creativity. Designing it as a mixed income project that can provide affordable living opportunities for seniors, downtown workers, artists, and students as well as the formerly homeless will highlight its economic development potential and the ability of supportive housing to

contribute to thriving neighborhoods.

Other buildings in State ownership: hospitals, schools, military barracks, and government buildings should also be considered for redevelopment into mixed income supportive housing. This could provide a solution for underutilised properties and address multiple community needs. Creating supportive housing as a component of other redevelopment initiatives is another opportunity to bear in mind. The area surrounding Stainforth Court is one case in point.

- › Expand and repurpose existing facilities: Several of the programs I visited could expand or repurpose their operations to make supportive housing arrangements available to homeless people. Some of these expansions/conversions could take place quickly. At Indigo Lodge, for example, unused areas of the buildings, plus many of the very attractive units themselves, could be converted to apartment style accommodation. At Youth Futures, next to York Park and the University campus, additional housing for young people in need could be built in that precinct. It could serve the University as well and connect young people in need with training and education. Bethlehem House could acquire additional homes in the community and provide housing and support to many more homeless men using their center on Warwick Street as a 'hub' for meals and services. McCombe House is already practicing a version of 'scatter site' housing by assisting women and children to return to homes in the community and offering ongoing support. More resources and assistance with home finding could enable them to increase the numbers of needy families they serve.

No doubt, other such opportunities exist to build on the capabilities, commitment and resources of existing programs. It would be fruitful to undertake an inventory of existing programs and determine the opportunities to transform emergency accommodation to housing and to expand the capacity of existing





services to provide housing and support to homeless people.

- › Scatter site housing: There is a one percent housing vacancy rate in Tasmania's cities, placing housing affordability pressures on many households. All Tasmanians can understand how these housing supply pressures make it all but impossible for the most vulnerable homeless to overcome their situation. Despite the limited amount of affordable rental housing available, it would be beneficial to engage landlords and brokers in identifying ways to access those options that do exist.

Tasmania's plan should set a target for the number of supportive housing units of all types that must be created.

- 5. Homeless youth:** I was struck during my visit at both the prevalence of youth homelessness, and the severity of the needs of those homeless young people I met. A particular focus on youth homelessness is merited, with attention to how to connect these young people with the new employment opportunities created by Tasmania's economic expansion. Stable, affordable housing arrangements for homeless young people are also needed as an alternative to dependence on transitional SAAP funded accommodations. The foyer model of housing for young people - an approach that originated in France, and was subsequently adopted in Great Britain - is one possibility. Foyers combine affordable accommodation with mentors/youth workers who assist young people in connecting with work and school and in acquiring the skills and habits to live as independent adults. The Australian Football Federation has announced its intention to support the development of foyer programs in Australia. Discussions are taking place in Melbourne and Adelaide about initial projects in those cities.
- 6. Employment:** The best protection against homelessness is a job. It is a skill gap that separates the most needy Tasmanians from participating in the jobs being created by Tasmania's economic growth; this is a major concern of government and on the agenda of the Social Inclusion Unit.

Economic development theorists point to the importance of considering secondary employment opportunities as well as primary ones at times of expansion. Many of the new jobs being created in growth industries will draw off skilled people from their existing jobs, which then will need to be backfilled. With expanding industries, the whole support infrastructure for them produces jobs with various skill and experience requirements. A comprehensive training and employment strategy taking into account all of the employment opportunities being created, and all Tasmanians, including those who are most marginalised, will be an important component of a successful effort to end homelessness.

- 7. Preventing homelessness:** Much more is now known about the factors and life experiences that produce homelessness. We know that there is a strong institutional overlap with homelessness, in that the transition from foster care, mental health institutions, correctional facilities and hospitals is often the moment that an individual becomes vulnerable to homelessness. Acknowledging this risk and making housing linkages part of the standard discharge practices of these institutions will prevent homelessness for many.

We also know that there is a geographic dimension to homelessness, and that communities of concentrated poverty and disadvantage are the places where housing arrangements frequently unravel. Moreover, these communities tend to have particularly high rates of child welfare cases, of juvenile justice cases and of adult incarceration. They also, typically, are areas where poor health is prevalent.

In New York City, Common Ground has begun working in one of these communities to assist high need families and individuals before everything collapses for them. It is a long term investment in bringing better quality housing, job links, health education, financial literacy and parenting supports to a targeted group of households in a recognised high need area. Our belief is that strengthening high poverty communities, making them more income diverse and reconnecting them to the mainstream community, will stem incidents of homelessness, now and into the future.



It is too early to tell whether our hypothesis is correct, though we have prevented hundreds of families from losing their housing, and the rate of homelessness from our targeted community has dropped. Tasmania may find it valuable to undertake a similar initiative in a high need community, and work on an individual and family basis to reduce homelessness (and other negative social outcomes), while implementing measures to improve the health and social environment of an entire neighborhood.

8. Communication: A whole-of-community effort to end homelessness in Tasmania will require a complementary communications strategy. For the community at large to shift its beliefs about homelessness, and understand that it is a solvable problem, regular messaging about the plan will be essential. An effective communications effort should consistently inform Tasmanians about the specific strategies being employed, progress made, challenges, and about the ways in which all Tasmanians can participate in ending homelessness – as a landlord, employer, church member or community volunteer. Communities that overlook this dimension of their efforts find themselves frustrated that while they may be meeting their interim goals, their progress is not noticed and attitudes about the homeless have not changed. The great opportunity of a whole-of-community plan to end homelessness, in which all in the community are informed and many are engaged, is that communities build confidence in their ability to come together to solve difficult problems. If citizens are not kept interested and informed about what is happening, or are not invited to participate in activities in support of the plan, the community - building potential of the effort will be lost. A communication strategy that keeps ending homelessness in the minds of Tasmanians need not be complex or costly, but will require consistent attention.

9. Leadership: What separates communities that make progress in ending homelessness from communities that do not is whether the jurisdictional leader is committed to the effort. In Tasmania, the fact that Premier Paul Lennon has initiated the effort to end homelessness bodes very well for its success. The aggressive time frame he has established, the commitment of State funds for public housing, the support of Minister Lara Giddings, the pledge of government property for housing, and the involvement of Tasmanians from all sectors of the community in the launch of the State effort has set the stage for exemplary progress.

There is also an opportunity for Tasmania to be a national - and international – leader in ending homelessness. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has made ending homelessness a national priority. Therese Rein has become patron of the Australian Common Ground Alliance to promote the creation of supportive housing and the use of other proven practices that end homelessness. Tasmania’s resolve, and quick start, in its effort to end homelessness in the State can be an example to other States and Territories, and to American and Canadian states and provinces that are not moving as quickly or effectively toward this goal.

In closing, let me commend all who have made ending homelessness in Tasmania a priority. When comparing homelessness in Tasmania with homelessness in American communities, or with other states and territories within Australia, the numbers of those experiencing homelessness are not great, nor overwhelming. Ending homelessness is a solvable problem. The keen sense of community that exists in Tasmania, and the deeply felt ties that Tasmanians feel for each other, were very evident to me. It is this spirit of mutual concern, neighborliness, and belief that a stable home is necessary to have a fair chance at a life of stability and contribution that can animate a successful whole-of-community response to homelessness in Tasmania.

