

# P A R I T Y

Some Reflections on the SAAP and Homelessness in Australia

Slums and Land

All Our Days

Defining and Defying the Image of Camp Pell

The Origins and Development of the Australian Women's Refuge Movement

Why I Work with the Elderly Homeless

The Freedom to Sleep: A History from the Long Grass in Darwin, Northern Territory

The Bigger Picture: Australian Homelessness Legal Advocacy

South Australian Housing Policy: Retrospective/Prospective.

From 'Vagrant' to 'Nuisance': 200 Years of Public Space Law In Queensland

Whatever Happened to the Revolution? ...

Activism and the Early Days of Youth Refuges in NSW

History of Response to Homelessness

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement

Talking like a Toora Woman: the herstory of a single women's service



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## Another Country: Histories of Homelessness



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Contributions to *Parity* are welcome. Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to homeless people. If possible, the length of contributions should be no greater than 1000 words. Please consult the *Parity* editor if this is insufficient.

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If neither of these two options is possible, contributions can be faxed on (03) 9419 7445 or mailed to the above address.

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## 2007 Draft

### Publications Schedule

**February:** *As Much Right:*

Homeless Young People and their Future

**March:** *Health and Homelessness:*

A Framework for the Future

**April:** Primary Homelessness

**May:** The Future of Women's Housing

**June:** *Homeless Families:*

New Responses to Homeless Families

**July:** *Enough is Enough:*

Rooming and Boarding Houses

**August:** Homelessness Research

**September:** Mental Health and Homelessness

**October:** Responding to Homelessness in New Zealand

**November:** Homelessness and Welfare Reform

*Expressions of interest in both contributing and sponsoring are welcome.*

**Note: The views and opinions expressed in this edition are not necessarily shared by either CHP or sponsoring bodies.**

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# Editorial

This is the last edition of *Parity* for 2006 and so it is worthwhile reflecting on the achievements of this year and looking ahead to 2007. Next year will be *Parity's* 20th anniversary. This shows the continuing relevance of such a publication. The longevity of *Parity* says as much about the ongoing interest in homelessness, as it does about the very fact that homelessness remains ever present, demonstrating an overall failure to address the structural causes of homelessness.

*Parity* is a national publication for discussion and understanding of the causes and appropriate responses to homelessness. Its success is evidenced by increasing subscriptions. More than 800 organisations and individuals now receive *Parity*.

As a subscriber, in 2006 you would have received editions that spanned a diverse and interesting range of issues:

**"Out in the Open: Public Space" Edition**

**Waking up to Homelessness: National Conference Edition**

**Guardianship and Administration, Disability and Homelessness**

**Working it Out: Employment, Unemployment and Homelessness**

**On the Outer: Homelessness in Outer Metropolitan Areas**

**Vulnerable, At Risk, In Danger: Supporting People with Complex Needs**

**The Future of Homeless Support**

**New Responses to Drugs, Alcohol and Homelessness**

**Men in the Middle: Homeless Men in the 21st Century**

**Another Country: Histories of Homelessness**

Over the last 2 to 3 years significant sponsorship has created the opportunity for bumper editions of *Parity*. This has provided a vehicle for a more comprehensive analysis of issues as well as contributing funding for the accompanying events.

## The Future

Some of the themes for 2007 include:

**February: Youth Homelessness "As Much Right: Homeless Young People and their Future"**

**March: Health and Homelessness (papers,**

**perspectives arising from the November 2006 Conference)**

**April: Primary homelessness (including itinerancy, sleeping rough and squatting)**

**May: The Future of Women's Housing**

**June: Rooming Houses Revisited**

**July: Homeless Families: New Responses to Homeless Families**

**August: Homelessness research (papers, perspectives arising from Research seminar)**

**September: Mental Health (current and emerging policy issue especially in light of COAG plan on mental health)**

**October: Homelessness in New Zealand**

**November: Homelessness and Welfare Reform**

Many thanks to all involved with the production of *Parity*. This includes the contributors, subscribers, sponsors, artists, photographers, supporters and critics who together make *Parity* a very unique publication and resource for the sector. Special thanks go to Joy Pagalos, the Council to Homeless Persons committed administration worker responsible for the *Parity* mail out as well as organising forums.

Now to this month's edition — a glimpse at the history of homelessness in Australia. Whilst all the articles are sensational, most poignant are the personal reflections on homelessness. For example, Bryan Lipmann CEO of Wintringham writes on how his first

contact with elderly homeless men in night shelters

motivated him to dedicate his working life to improving the circumstances of elderly people experiencing homelessness while Tony Birch reminds us that the personal is political. Other articles reflect on the history of the SAAP program, developments in the women's refuge movement, the provision of legal assistance for people who experience homelessness and charting the significant involvement of those providing assistance in advocating for change and the development of the youth homelessness sector. I am confident you will find this edition a useful resource.

These articles demonstrate an improved understanding and appreciation of the issues faced by people who are homeless and reflects a gradual shift in Government policy. However, in most recent research undertaken by Hanover Welfare Services Melbourne the cold hard facts remain that most members of the community do not appreciate the nature and extent of homelessness and further to this, perceive vulnerable people who experience homelessness as at fault or to blame for their circumstances. Perhaps we have not traveled that far at all.

Thank you for being a subscriber to *Parity*, we look forward to continuing to bring you a high quality publication in 2007 that will assist and guide your individual and organisations efforts to eliminate homelessness.

**Deb Tsorbaris,  
CEO Council to Homeless Persons**



# Some Reflections on the SAAP and Homelessness in Australia

By Doug Limbrick, Director Performance, Reporting and Data, Housing and Disability Group, FaCSIA.

## Introduction

The 1st of January this year marked an important event in the history of the development of service provision to homeless people in this country — SAAP turned 21. The advent of SAAP in 1985 was very important at that time for the future provision of support and services in the area of homelessness. SAAP created a more comprehensive national response to homelessness and involved for the first time the Commonwealth and each State and Territory entering into a partnership to address homelessness. In entering into this agreement both levels of government recognised that homelessness was a problem that required a national response. The significance of this step to the shaping of homelessness service delivery in this country was substantial. It raised the profile of homelessness as a significant social issue, provided a structure for both levels of government to work together and secured increased funding for improved service responses.

## History

Homelessness is clearly not a nineteenth century phenomenon in this country. There was evidence of homelessness from the early days of colonisation amongst the new arrivals and clearly the Indigenous people were progressively moved from their home lands as colonisation expanded. Organised service provision commenced as early as about 1830 when Caroline Chisholm started to provide assistance to single women in crisis. She was instrumental in establishing an accommodation facility to protect this group from some of the more distasteful aspects of colonial life. By the middle of the century Sydney Mission commenced provision of hostel type assistance to single homeless men. During this period the causes of homelessness were associated with the plight of the individual.

By the 1970's our understanding of homelessness was still fairly unsophisticated and was largely associated with transience and habitual drunkenness and sometimes criminality (prior to that the analysis was even simpler being an almost romantic notion of men who were down on their luck or down and out). These perceptions led to an understanding of homelessness that was largely about failures associated with the individual and these individuals were predominantly single men.

A study of homeless men by Jordan<sup>1</sup> in the period 1963-1967 found the average age to be around 42.

The early 1970's saw the collapse of full employment and unemployment rose rapidly, which had a particular impact on large numbers of young people. Young people started to appear in the population using night shelters. The deinstitutionalisation of people with a disability also occurred in the mid 70's. Despite the sound policy objectives of this process it none the less has had an incredible impact on the nature of the homeless population in this country.

The first Federal government homelessness legislation, the Homeless Persons Assistance Act, was passed by the national Parliament in 1974. This Act introduced the Homeless Persons Assistance Program; the first national program aimed at meeting the needs of homeless people. This program provided capital funding to non-government agencies for the provision of shelter and funding for some operational costs, such as a subsidy for the number of meals provided each day. A number of large dormitory style hostels were built under this Program. They provided a bed, meals, a shower and clean clothing. It was thus very much an institutional response to homelessness, as opposed to the individualised responses that were to follow.

In 1975 the Henderson Poverty Report<sup>2</sup> was released. It recognised that homelessness was associated with poverty. However, the analysis of homelessness in that report was largely confined to an association of the cause with a lack of affordable accommodation.

Awareness of the structural causes of homelessness accelerated during the recession of the 1980's and this was accompanied by recognition of new emerging types of homelessness among women, young people and families.

By 1985 when SAAP started there were some interesting changes happening which saw recognition of homelessness as an issue of national significance, closely related to the broader question of housing affordability rather than being perceived as a relatively minor issue affecting a small substratum of marginalised people. The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless in 1987 also increased attention to the problem. However, the solution in the early years of SAAP was largely seen as the provision of affordable housing. It wasn't until the Burdekin Report<sup>3</sup> in 1989 that the complex nature of homelessness started to be unpacked, as the Burdekin Inquiry explored the lives and revealed the stories of homeless young people.

## Definitions

The early discussions about definitions frequently focussed on the perceived cause, which was largely viewed as being associated with the problems of the individual. This was influenced by the understanding and often untested social realities of homelessness. An implication was that homelessness was in an absolute sense about the absence of physical shelter, which of course did not take account of the full implications of homelessness. The desire for a more comprehensive definition of homelessness started to emerge in the literature in the mid 1970's. For example this issue was discussed in the Poverty Inquiry report.

A 1978 report by the Department of Social Security<sup>4</sup> listed three ways of defining homelessness:

1. a lack of shelter;
2. disaffiliation from the institutions of conventional society, including the family, or
3. affiliation with a natural group called "homeless people".

This definition is interesting as it suggests that there is in existence a homeless sub-culture. This is interesting as the report also comments that the homeless population is far from homogenous and includes people from different backgrounds, situations and prospects.

In the 1980's discussion about definitions started to examine other factors such as marginalisation, structural causes, the impact of inadequate income and differences between chronic and temporary homelessness. As the needs of homeless people became clearer the definitions became more comprehensive, recognising that support of a various kinds would be required to meet these needs.

It wasn't until 1994 that SAAP legislation<sup>5</sup> provided a definition that captured the complexities of homelessness: 'a person is homeless, if and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing'. Inadequate access to safe and secure housing is described in the legislation in terms of housing that may damage the person's health, threaten the person's safety, marginalises the person because of inadequate amenities of social supports that





a home normally affords or places the person in circumstances that could affect safety, security and affordability.

More recent work, such as Robinson's<sup>6</sup> discussion of people with a mental disorder, which explores a temporal perspective, is introducing a further method of viewing homelessness.

An interesting perspective on what constitutes no longer being homeless was put by Barry Warren a former homeless person at a recent conference: "You don't feel homeless when you can say you are going home and you feel good about it".<sup>7</sup> This highlights the importance of "home" in the current definitions.

## SAAP Agreements and Legislation

There have been three pieces of SAAP legislation: 1985, 1989 and 1995. The first two Supported Accommodation Assistance Acts set objectives that largely reflected the prevailing view of homelessness at the time they were drafted. The emphasis was very much on resolving crisis by providing appropriate accommodation. The third Act was significantly different and moved SAAP into a social justice paradigm. This is most clearly reflected in the wording of the Preamble to the ACT. An early paragraph in the Preamble states:

*Homeless people form one of the most powerless and marginalised groups in society. Responses to their needs should aim to empower them and to maximise their independence. These responses should be provided in a way that respects their dignity, enhances their self-esteem, is sensitive to their social and economic circumstances, and respects their cultural backgrounds and their beliefs.*

The preamble concluded:

*The Parliament intends that the Commonwealth Government should work co-operatively with State and Territory governments to ensure that people who are homeless or risk of homelessness are given opportunities to redress their circumstances and their universal human rights are not prejudiced by the manner in which services are provided to them.*

This legislation is still in place and underpinned the SAAP IV and the new SAAP V agreements between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. In SAAP V there are two levels of agreements: a Multilateral Agreement and Bilateral Agreements between the Commonwealth and each State and Territory.



The strategic directions of SAAP V reflect both the changing nature of the SAAP population and the findings of research and evaluation conducted during SAAP IV.

## Evidence Base Developments

In an article that I wrote for the August edition of Parity I examined the development in definitions of homelessness and the needs of homeless people. In the article I presented data from the SAAP National Data Collection about the support needs of SAAP clients and the services they received, together with data from the High and Complex Needs Study, data from the Client Satisfaction study about what clients thought were their problems and needs and information about the nature of the diversity of service delivery models funded under SAAP. All of these sources of information pointed to a very diverse client population with multiple and often complex needs.

With each successive SAAP agreement we have increased our understanding of the population using SAAP services, through data activities, research projects, pilot studies, special surveys, case studies, etc and during SAAP IV we also had some 30 small projects which enabled SAAP agencies to undertake their own research projects. There are now also many other research studies on homelessness and the homeless population and the third national count of homeless people has recently been undertaken in conjunction with the 2006 Census. There is thus a very considerable body of knowledge about homelessness and particularly about the homeless people using SAAP. Further studies are underway or planned for SAAP V. For example, the following work has been endorsed for SAAP V:

- Improvements to the SAAP data collection, including development of an Indigenous package to assist participation by Indigenous agencies where English is a second language;
- Data linkage work which will enable us to look at the movement of people in a non identifying way between programs (e.g. the flow of people from mental health services to SAAP, young people with a care background entering SAAP);
- A project on measurement of improved client self reliance (which is one of the outcomes for SAAP set out in the legislation);
- Further work on client outcome measurement in collaborating with agencies already using previously developed outcome measurement tools);
- A study of housing outcomes for people who leave homelessness;
- A repeat of the high and complex needs study; and
- A further project on client satisfaction.

## The Future

SAAP has grown in 21 years from a relatively small Commonwealth State program of \$28 million in 1985 to a \$324 million program in 2005-06. During that period there has been considerable change, growth and development. SAAP has moved from a relatively unsophisticated program and set of service responses to a program that now assists daily over 20,000 people with a very broad range of creative and innovative services.

There has also been an enormous growth in other services for homeless people, particularly those associated with various homelessness strategies that have emerged in the past 5 years.

The very significant progress that has been made in SAAP and through the various strategies has in large part taken place because of the increased understanding about homelessness derived from the large amount of knowledge and evidence that is now available. The knowledge about good practice has been used by many service providers to enhance service provision. Many people have been prepared to respond to changing needs, to share information, to question practices, to try new approaches and to encourage and foster change. Two important and difficult challenges for the future are to improve our capacity and approaches to prevent homelessness and to be able to achieve permanent solutions for individuals so that they only experience homelessness once.

SAAP V is building on this very substantial base of good work. A challenge for SAAP is to utilise more effectively the results of good practice that is taking place around the country and the substantial evidence base derived from research and data activities. If services, programs and activities are to continue to expand and be funded then we need to be able to tell the stories and demonstrate clearly the outcomes that are being achieved for homeless people. ■

## Footnotes

1. Jordan, A., 1994, *Going Bad: Homeless men in an Australian City*, Council to Homeless Persons Victoria, Melbourne, p.88.
2. Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, 1975, *Poverty in Australia*, First Main Report (Prof. R.F.Henderson, Chairman), AGPS, Canberra.
3. Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, Human Rights and Equal opportunity Commission, 1989, *Our Homeless Children*, (Brian Burdekin, Chairman), AGPS, Canberra.
4. Department of Social Security, 1978, *A Place of Dignity: A Survey of Homeless People and Homeless Persons Assistance Centres*, AGPS, Canberra.
5. Supported Accommodation Assistance Act, 1994, part 4.
6. Robinson, C., 2003, *Understanding Iterative Homelessness: the Case of People with Mental Disorders*, Sydney, AHURI.
7. Warren, Barry, 2006, *Homeless Citizens Take Centre Stage*, Homelessness SA Conference Homelessness and SAAP Reform, 16-17 November, Alan Scott Park Function Centre, Adelaide.

# Slums and Land

By Heather Holst\*

Australian public interest in homelessness has been very low in recent years, yet there was a period when universal housing topped the policy agenda.

Concern about poor housing dates back to the 1870s and a 1916-17 Royal Commission considered the matter. Many of the British anti-slum movement themes of contagious disease and contagious immorality were taken up by early Melbourne campaigners.<sup>1</sup> However, it was the slum abolition campaign in 1930s Melbourne which galvanised public opinion to such an extent that every wise politician included working class housing in their policy platform. The Melbourne campaign was conducted by a number of individuals and organisations meeting as the Slum Study Group, but the most prominent campaigner was Frederick Oswald Barnett.

Barnett was born in 1883 in the working-class Melbourne suburb of Brunswick, the son of a Cornish quarryman. The Barnett family had a hard 1890s Depression but Barnett continued his education with his older sister's support, went on to pass the public service exam, became an accountant with his own business, moved to the eastern suburbs and completed a Master of Commerce. Barnett was an active Methodist lay preacher, voluntary treasurer for church organisations<sup>2</sup> and, as a young man, member of the Knighthood of Christ — the 'pick of the Methodist Church' by his later description.<sup>3</sup> The Knighthood were interested in the 'child rescue' of poor children for adoption into middle class homes. This 'child rescue' work of the 1910s and '20s led Barnett into housing reform, but children remained a central housing theme and poor children continued to be sent to the Methodist Babies Home. Interestingly, child removal and homelessness remain tragically linked.

The 1933 Census found 33,000 people travelling in the hope of work and 400,000 living in shelters made of 'iron, calico, canvas, bark, hessian and other scavenged materials' but this was not the agenda of Barnett and other reformers.<sup>4</sup> They were interested in the inner city where people were at least housed, if poorly, but were suspected of living immorally. Barnett would later describe his shock at discovering the 'true nature of the slums' when lecturing boys at a Little Lonsdale Street mission one day on the inadvisability of tobacco smoking.<sup>5</sup> He '... reeled, absolutely reeled' when the Mission Sister described the boys' living conditions.

Barnett's ideas were laid out in his 1931 Master of Commerce thesis, which was published in 1933.<sup>6</sup> He analysed the national economic impact of slums and reported a survey administered by the Melbourne Ladies' Benevolent Society on the Fitzroy

poor. Slum dwellers' characters were described based on earnings, drinking habits, criminality, parentage and whether they were 'dissolute'. The surveyor assessed whether each man was 'derelict' or a 'unionist' and each woman 'slovenly' or 'loved and cared for her children'. Barnett explained that the slums were hidden in 'pockets' off some of the city's most prosperous thoroughfares. This rhetoric, borrowed from America and Britain, made the sudden discovery of the slums believable as well as alarmingly close.

Barnett took photographs which complimented his statistics and anecdotes. One of the most extraordinary shows two women on their front step holding their babies with Barnett's caption asserting that one of the children would soon die from its mother's drunken neglect. The photographs were used in lantern slide shows accompanied by affecting narrations of slum life. Barnett and others Slum Study Group members were appealed to each audience — mounting a 'virile attack' for the politically minded of the Constitutional Club and highlighting the children for the Women Citizens Club. The same photographs were used in the press campaign to which Sir Keith Murdoch, *The Herald* proprietor, lent vital support. Articles appeared regularly in all the major papers from 1932, culminating in 1936 with *The Herald's* month-long series 'Why Melbourne Needs Better Housing'.<sup>7</sup>

Barnett persuaded Premier Dunstan, accompanied by eighteen carloads of politicians, to tour the slums in 1935 and recalled that they made such a splendid procession that people thought them a funeral and took off their hats. They were indeed a harbinger of the passing of several Melbourne neighbourhoods. Barnett was soon invited to a Cabinet meeting after which the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board was established.<sup>8</sup>

Barnett was Deputy Chair of this Board which gave much more attention to actual housing conditions, although slum dwellers' characters were still studied.<sup>9</sup> The Board externally inspected every house within a five mile radius of the GPO and in other 'slum pockets', decided which were 'slum' and sought entry to inspect the interior and question the occupants. Their report found 2,833 'slum and sub-standard houses' and ranked suburbs by the incidence of unsound floors, skillion roofs and so on. It also categorised areas as 'Slum Pocket', 'Congested Area', 'Blighted Area', 'Decadent Area' (with three sub-categories), 'Mixed Area' and 'Shanty Settlement'. The report was further enlivened by naming hundreds of slum landlords, several of whom sat in parliament.

Legislation was enacted to establish the Housing Commission, allow inspection for repairs or demolition, declare whole

neighbourhoods slum areas and to compulsorily acquire for demolition and building of new public housing.<sup>10</sup> The war interrupted this work but also ensured national reform as the imperative to house returned servicemen motivated large-scale public housing construction. Barnett declined a 1943 invitation to chair the Commonwealth Housing Commission.<sup>11</sup> This Commission drew on Barnett's concept of the 'housing question' but with less emphasis on slums and it seriously contemplated land nationalisation.<sup>12</sup>

Barnett and the Slum Study Group's campaign was a triumph in terms of producing public housing of a decent standard but exacted a cost on people in whose name it was waged. A certain rhetoric produces a certain result. Casting slum dwellers as objects of horrified pity, as 'other' than the mainstream 'us' provoked a public response which expected many rules for tenants. It offers a warning about enlisting a certain type of public opinion based on the idea that homeless people are somehow different (and not as good).

## Rights to Land

Victoria had taken quite a while to get to this point of concern about housing that began to rumble in Melbourne in the 1870s but did not peak until the 1930s. Up until these slum abolition campaigns, the matter of where people lived was understood in terms of land rather than housing. Once you had a piece of land, you could construct a house as your means allowed and people might start with bark and canvas then progress to more solid construction when they had more time and money. Government policy since squatters first laid claim to great tracts of land had all been geared towards dividing up the colony's land — and obtaining it freely from the Aboriginal owners who were systematically made homeless.

Grazing licences and freehold purchase rights proceeded as the legal basis for landholding until the great upheavals of the 1850s gold rushes. The Ballarat Eureka rebellion of 1854 is rightly celebrated as the battle which won white men the vote in Victoria and fairer terms under which to mine, but it has been little remarked for its other great victory of winning the mining population the right to housing.

The Miners Right was introduced in 1855 and gave the holder a quarter acre parcel of 'the waste lands of the Crown' for, '... the purpose of residence in connection with the object of mining ... and every holder shall during the continuance of such Miner's Right be deemed in law to be the owner.'<sup>13</sup> That is, the holder of a mining licence also acquired land for a house and garden. This licence could be readily renewed annually with the landholder having the right to first purchase. After the Eureka rebellion, the

cost of a mining licence was reduced to be affordable for almost everyone. This system only applied in goldfields areas but these formed a large part of the settled districts of Victoria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Similar legislation was enacted in the goldfields of the other colonies.

Miners Right holders were entitled to collect wood and stone from Crown Land for building purposes. After 1865 a Residence Area could be transferred to another holder of a Miners Right and any 'improvements' (house, garden, sheds, fencing) could be sold. The buyer had simply to take out a Miners Right and nominate the land on which their purchased 'improvements' sat as their Residence Area. Both men and women could hold a Miner's Right, as long as a woman could establish her status as *femme sole*. These were very advantageous terms and made an enormous contribution to ordinary people making a home on the goldfields. This system would continue for over a hundred years into the 1960s when the Residence Areas were converted by the Victorian government into freehold title.<sup>14</sup>

The system always had its critics on the basis that it was all a bit 'free and easy' and it was especially deplored by those who wanted residential property completely in the market. In the agricultural lands of Victoria and many other parts of Australia, the Selection Acts would play the role of the Miners Right in offering ordinary people the opportunity of holding land. This too was law made in response to the widespread demand to 'throw open the lands'. There are other examples of opening up land as a solution to pressing social problems, most notably the Soldier Settlement programs after the two world wars and the Village Settlement schemes of the 1890s depression that established many small towns around Victoria.

The sort of rhetoric that would emerge from the *Royal Commission into the Housing of the People in the Metropolis* that was held between 1913 and 1917 in Victoria would challenge this popular housing strategy, at least in Melbourne. The report deplored the disorganised and unsanitary nature of housing that had been erected on the foreshore of Port Phillip Bay and on river and creek fronts, much of it makeshift and all taking advantage of free Crown Land.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, the Bendigo Council acted against dwellings of elderly Chinese men living on Miners Rights in Ironbark, intensively inspecting and demolishing some of their houses on the basis that they were unsanitary, yet with no plan for rehousing.<sup>16</sup>

The underlying contests were over whether or not residential property should be unequivocally a market commodity and whether or not people could live in the conditions of their own choosing, even if the experts found these conditions unsanitary, unprofitable or immoral.

I think the Miners Right Residence Areas can be understood as the result of an

effective public campaign by the people directly in need of that outcome. It came with very few conditions apart from annually paying for a mining licence (it was not even necessary to actually work at mining). By contrast, the other housing solutions of Soldier Settlement, Village Settlement, the Selection Acts and particularly of public housing all came with more onerous strings attached. ■

\* Heather Holst is a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne.

#### Footnotes

1. Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum, Housing and Social Policy in Victorian Britain* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977).
2. Interview with E.W. Russell in *The Slum Abolition Movement in Victoria 1933-37*, 29 and in "I Remember", the autobiographical piece in F.O Barnett "Papers", Boxes 1666/7, State Library of Victoria. A tribute prepared by Rev. H. Palmer on the occasion of Barnett's retirement as treasurer of Wesley Central Mission notes that he was eighty-two years old at the time of this retirement in an unnamed paper clipping in the "F. O. Barnett Box," Uniting Church In Australia, Victoria Synod Archives.
3. *The Front Line* (November 1917): 17-20 in the "F. Oswald Barnett Papers," MS Boxes 1666/7, State Library of Victoria. The quote is from the Russell interview in 1967. Brian Howe mentions his own memories of Barnett still meeting with a group of Church contemporaries, the Good Companions, as a much older man in the 1950s. Brian Howe, *Housing for the Twenty-first Century: Building on Barnett* (Melbourne: Ecumenical Housing, 1997), 5.
4. John Archer, *Building a Nation: A History of the Australian House* (Sydney: Collins, 1987), 174-75.
5. Also in Barnett, *The Unsuspected Slums*, 5-6.
6. F. O. Barnett, "The Economics of the Slum" (Master of Commerce Thesis: University of Melbourne, 1931).
7. *The Herald*, 21.5.1936 to 24.6.1936.
8. Renate Howe, *New Houses for Old*, 21-26 and Russell, *The Slum Abolition Movement*, 27-28.
9. Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board 1936-37. *First (Progress) Report with Appendices and Supplements: Slum Reclamation: Housing for the Lower-paid Worker. Short Term Programme*. Melbourne: 6th October 1937.
10. These acts of the Victorian Parliament were: Housing Act 1937, no.4531 (to establish the Housing Commission); Slum Reclamation and Housing Act 1938, no.4568; Slum Reclamation and Housing (Financial) Act 1938, no.4583; Slum Reclamation and Housing Act 1939, no. 4562.
- 11.
12. Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction, *Commonwealth Housing Commission* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1944).
13. Parliament of Victoria, VR No. XXXVII, 'An Act to amend the Laws relating to the Goldfields', 12th June, 1855, section III. The same right was extended to holders of business licences in designated goldfields areas.
14. Ralph Birrell, *Staking a Claim. Gold and the Development of Victorian Mining Law* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998).
15. Legislative Council of Victoria. "First Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Housing Conditions of the People in the Metropolis and Populous Centres of the State (Sanitation and Housing Conditions at Seaside Resorts, Extending from Black Rock to Frankston) Together with an Appendix", VPP, vol.1481, 1915. Also in David Harris's chapter in Renate Howe, ed., *New Houses for Old. Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938-1988* (Melbourne: Ministry of Housing and Construction, 1988), 1-19.
16. Yolande Collins, 'Chinese communal arrangements in Bendigo and health officer surveillance, 1870s-1905' in Paul Macgregor, ed., *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific. Proceedings of an International Public Conference Held at the Museum of Chinese Australian History, Melbourne, 8-10 October 1993* (1995), 394-408.





# All Our Days

By Tony Birch\*

My father's second wife died in 2005 after battling a debilitating illness for many years. He has also suffered an illness for more than thirty years left him homeless until he was eventually provided with secure public housing accommodation. The sense of emotional and economic security it continues to provide him also contributes to his general wellbeing. Unfortunately, the resources provided for public housing are not enough and many people remain unassisted.

In the decades that my father has been sick his contact with both his immediate and extended family has been occasional (at best). There are some members of his family

sits with at their local shopping centre. They smoke cigarette after cigarette and talk of their love for sport and a strong dislike for particular politicians. For some of these men their housing situation remains tenuous. The Salvation Army's Brunswick Citadel, again, as in my father's case, supports many of these men. They enjoy a meal there, and they socialise there. While some of these men remain marginalised by the 'mainstream' community they, with the help of the Salvation Army, have built a community amongst themselves.

On the day of my stepmother's funeral I walked into a small chapel in North Fitzroy, relieved to see that it was full of people. Some of the mourners were from the hospice where my stepmother had been

Politically I have always believed in the need and value of the welfare state; in that as a society we should be responsible for the economic and social welfare of each other, and that we should be prepared to pay for this security net, with the acceptance and understanding of its mutual *net* value. I grew up also believing that people should not have to rely on charity handouts to survive, particularly from religiously based charities. My beliefs seem almost anachronistic in the individualised post welfare state.

After leaving my father at the Citadel I was less assured about my own ideological stance, which was both naive and ill-informed, in that it lacked the experience of my father and his friends. Whether anyone should need to rely on charity is a moot point — absolute — when governments and the wider community — *we* — abrogate our own social and economic responsibilities.

More importantly than this obvious point I also realised while sitting down with my cup of tea and watched as my father's friends spoke with him that it was not charity that was being offered, and that it was not a handout that brought my father and the other men to this small building in a side street in Brunswick each day. It was due to the friendship on offer, and the sense of belonging that had cost nothing in material terms, but gave so much of spiritual value.

In recent week's Melbourne's news media have given coverage to the plight of the city's homeless as a result of a fire in a Brunswick accommodation unit in which two people died. We have been exposed to the exploitation of people who for whatever reason find themselves in a vulnerable situation, and at the prey of others. Some of these people are older men like my father and his friends. Some are young teenagers. Many are families. They live in my suburb. And they live in your suburb.

While reading these articles I was reminded of a writer I heard being interviewed on the radio one morning while I was in my kitchen. The writer's father had spent many years living on the street. He asked listeners to contemplate a situation, whereby when we got up of a morning we had no idea where we might be sleeping that night, and that much of our day would be spent having to negotiate a bed for ourselves, and possibly our loved ones. If this were not difficult enough he reminded us that those who are homeless would have to go through this same process tomorrow, and the next day, and the next . . .

Members of our community should not be forced to spend their days this way. ■

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with whom he has had little or no contact for some years now. I believe that when families become estranged or even shatter we perhaps need a 'no fault' clause in place if we are to have any chance to rebuild relationships. Some years ago I adopted this approach with regard to my relationship with my father, with some success, and eventually a sense of mutual acceptance between us.

In the days between my stepmother's death and her funeral I was worried that there would be few people at the service. She had been confined to a hospice for some time, and her own family, not unlike my father's, were both emotionally and geographically dispersed. If death is any reflection on our lives, a farewell from those who love and care about us is an indicator of both who we are and those we have touched.

I knew that the friends my father has comprise largely of a group of men that he

lovingly cared for in the months before she died. Many of the others in the chapel were my father's crew from Brunswick.

I watched from a pew at the back of the chapel as men approached my father and offered their condolences. Some of them shook his hand. Others hugged him, while one or two awkwardly kept their hands buried in pants pockets. Two officers from the Brunswick Citadel led the service. There was a lot of singing of hymns and many tears. Afterwards I could see that my father was content. This was made possible because of the care shown him by his community.

After the service we went back to the Brunswick Citadel for a cup of tea, a biscuit and a chat. I was introduced to many of my father's friends. They were not without their troubles, but they had taken time away from their own difficulties to help my father get through his. I left the Citadel realising that I had been in a remarkable place.



# Defining and Defying the Image of Camp Pell

By Nell Musgrove \*

Located in Melbourne's inner-suburban Royal Park, Camp Pell had become a notorious city landmark well before it began its life as an emergency housing camp in the postwar decade. It was originally created to cater for the thousands of American troops that flooded into Melbourne in 1942. The concentration of so many foreign troops in one place was enough to raise anxieties about the possible negative social impact of the camp, and such fears appeared confirmed when it was revealed that Camp Pell had been home to the man convicted of the sexualised murders of three women known as the 'brownout stranglings'.<sup>1</sup> Following the end of the war in the Pacific, American troops evacuated the camp and the Victorian Housing Commission took over its control, using the huts as emergency housing for families in crisis. For the next ten years Camp Pell's infamous reputation expanded, a reputation which impacted upon both the people who lived there and the welfare workers who sought to house and assist them.<sup>2</sup>

## Life in Camp Pell 1945-1955

Living conditions in Camp Pell were difficult. Many children were caught up in the waves of contagious diseases (including rheumatic and scarlet fevers) that swept through the camp, and illnesses such as impetigo,

pneumonia and severe diarrhoea were constantly threatening the lives of those being raised in the crowded and poverty-stricken conditions. The easy assumption of the general population was that these children's ailments must be, at least partially, the consequence of parental neglect. At the very least there was deep suspicion about the circumstances which had forced families to raise children in Camp Pell in the first place.

Older children roamed with relative autonomy around the camp in their leisure time; indeed there was little other choice barring confining children to the already overcrowded huts. These groups of children took on the status of 'gangs' or 'packs' in the public imagination and were thus seen as constant potential threats. Groups of boys were considered to be violent, criminal and 'looking for trouble', and groups of girls were seen as sexually provocative, precocious and promiscuous. These projections were not unlike those applied to all 'wayward' youths at the time, but the visibility of groups of these children around Camp Pell was taken as evidence of the suspect moral fibre of the families who lived there.

Similarly, in the formation of popular assumptions, little pause was taken in order to consider the multiplicity of circumstances influencing the condition of residents' huts. Even as Melbournians found themselves in the grip of a housing crisis that lasted well into the 1950s, (3) the

Australian imagination was centring its sense of identity around the 'suburban dream home', an icon of middle class respectability that symbolised a moral commitment to an 'Australian way of life'. Perceived compliance with the ideals and values of this 'way of life' had far more to do with a family's visible efforts towards presenting the home they had in an acceptable way than with their actual financial ability to procure the suburban brick home and  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre block.<sup>4</sup>

The conditions of camp life made it difficult to maintain a home that, according to popular expectations, demonstrated that sufficient care and attention had been paid to it. The fact that residents were encouraged to view their stay at Camp Pell as transitory only exacerbated this situation. Understandably, many families were reluctant to spend time and money on a home from which they might be moved in only a short time. As has so often been the case for people living in poverty, the families of Camp Pell were under public scrutiny without serious consideration being given to their particular difficulties. Consequently they were often found wanting.

## Contrasting Perceptions of Camp Pell

Given the situations that led families to take up residence in Camp Pell, it comes as little surprise to find that many had dealings with one or more of the city's welfare agencies.





Although poverty was the driving factor which meant that so many Camp Pell families became clients of various welfare agencies, there was a range of situations which led to relationships with caseworkers being forged. Broadly, these can be considered under three categories: issues around the custody of children;<sup>5</sup> the need for material support;<sup>6</sup> finally, and most germane to this article, housing assistance.

In making recommendations about the suitability of families for placement at Camp Pell, caseworkers frequently revealed that despite their training and experience, they shared many of the popular assumptions about life at Camp Pell.<sup>7</sup> It must be said that these stereotypes were not based entirely on fiction. There were in reality some situations within the camp that almost anyone would have found confronting — in some extreme cases other residents themselves reported families to welfare authorities — but caseworkers were quick to expect Camp Pell families to fit the stereotypes and guarded in making sympathetic or generous assessments of them.

Caseworkers saw Camp Pell as a last resort, even amongst the emergency housing options. In particular, it was the moral environment that caseworkers saw as rendering Camp Pell as undesirable, and children were considered particularly vulnerable to the negative influences of camp life.

Caseworkers shared the popular perception that Camp Pell was a place where girls and women were vulnerable to sexual advances and where promiscuity was encouraged. In the case of one family facing eviction the mother was advised 'not on any account to take her attractive girls to Camp Pell' despite the fact that no other

accommodation seemed likely to present itself.<sup>8</sup> Another woman, a victim of spousal abuse, had the possibility of securing a hut for herself and her daughters, but the caseworker advised her to reconcile with her husband in the interest of keeping her daughters away from Camp Pell.<sup>9</sup>

The camp was seen as a less perilous place for boys, as long as they had track records of good behaviour. Where boys had histories of truancy or petty theft, parents were encouraged to place them in care rather than increase the 'risk' by accepting accommodation at Camp Pell.

These opinions were not always shared by the families seeking help, to whom the camp, if not a desirable location, was clearly their best option at a particular time. Having assessed their current living conditions, such families argued that a hut, wherever it was, would have to be an improvement. More interesting are the cases where families sought placement at Camp Pell against the advice of their caseworkers. Here the key issue was its location close to the social networks and employment opportunities upon which such families relied. Many families refused huts at the Watsonia housing camp (roughly 20km north-east of the city centre) and even houses in the same area, instead pressuring their caseworkers to find them a place at Camp Pell. Others refused casework altogether, appearing at intervals to enquire about the possibility of now obtaining residence at Camp Pell.

Camp Pell provides an archetypal example of the negative assumptions that are often made about families experiencing a housing crisis and reminds welfare workers to carefully interrogate the assumptions that they themselves make about their clients. This study should also serve as a reminder

that the homeless define their needs and their desires on their own terms and that these may not fit with the plans for aid that are put in place for them. There is no doubt that Camp Pell saw more than its share of poverty and deprivation during the years it was used as an emergency housing camp, but rather than this suffering merely being a past phenomenon for people to lament, perhaps it can be used as a tool for improving the ways Australians understand and respond to families facing homelessness in the 21st century.

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#### Footnotes

1. Helen Pace, "All the Nice Girls ...' a Case Study in the Social Control of Women, Melbourne, 1942," *Hecate* 18, no. 1 (1992): 49.
2. The information about Camp Pell given here is taken from research conducted by the author and primarily draws on a selection of client case files from the Citizen's Welfare Service, Children's Protection Society and Children's Welfare Department archival collections. In order to protect the privacy of individuals whose files are cited directly, case files have been identified using an alternative numbering system, the key to which is held by the author.
3. Warwick Eather, "We Only Build Houses: The Commission 1945-60," in *New Houses for Old: Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria, 1938-1988*, ed. Renate Howe (Melbourne: Ministry of Housing and Construction, 1988), p.69.
4. For further development of this argument see Nell Musgrove, "'Filthy' Homes and 'Fast' Women: Welfare Agencies' Moral Surveillance in Post-Second World War Melbourne," *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 80 (Jan 2004).
5. Families in these cases started at a disadvantage simply by living in Camp Pell. Assessments depended not only upon a parent's ability and desire to provide for a child's basic needs, but also on their ability to provide an environment which would foster the healthy moral development of the child. For more on this see Nell Musgrove, "Making Better Families: Surveillance, Evaluation and Control of Families in Melbourne, 1945-1965" (MA, University of Melbourne, 2003), Dorothy Scott and Shurlee Swain, *Confronting Cruelty: Historical Perspectives on Child Protection in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).
6. Although most of the families who made applications to the three agencies considered here received some kind of assistance, it was generally an uphill battle to secure the kinds of support they sought and some charitable funds were reluctant to provide financial or material support to residents of Camp Pell at all.
7. Although Camp Pell was under the control of the Victorian Housing Commission, the assessments of caseworkers from other agencies (most notably the Citizens' Welfare Service) could be used in making evaluations of applicants.
8. Case file #576.
9. Case file #420. Cases of domestic violence need to be understood in a historical perspective. Caseworkers certainly didn't work on a 'zero tolerance' policy as far as spousal abuse was concerned, but neither did they uniformly encourage reconciliation. Where a woman was assessed as facing desperate circumstances as a sole-parent, she was often advised to attempt a reunion with her husband.



# The Origins and Development of the Australian Women's Refuge Movement

By Suellen Murray,  
RMIT University

The Australian women's refuge movement<sup>1</sup> is part of an international movement that, from the 1970s, has provided services to women and children and brought domestic violence<sup>2</sup> to the attention of government and the wider community, ultimately leading to significant changes in social policy and service delivery. In 2006, the Australian women's refuge movement remains centrally involved in these developments. There are, however, significant issues still to be resolved.

While in Australia services existed from the nineteenth century from which women sought accommodation at times of crisis, such as the rescue homes of the Salvation Army, the first organisations that institutionalised domestic violence as a reason for women and children leaving their homes were established just over thirty years ago. These events in Australia followed similar developments that emerged from Women's Liberation movements in the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States in the early 1970s (Pizzey 1974; Walker 1990). The first Australian refuge, 'Elsie' was established in Sydney in 1974 by a group of feminists. The service was initially unfunded, staffed by volunteers and located in an unoccupied house that the group took over as a squat to provide refuge for women and children escaping domestic violence (Lyons, Nyland & Saunders, 1994; Summers, 1999). However, Elsie, and the other refuges that were set up in its wake, not only provided crisis accommodation and other support to women, they also worked to produce social change around domestic violence in a range of ways including changing community understandings and improving the wider service system responses.

The development of the women's refuge movement was informed by a gendered analysis of domestic violence, both recognising that women (and children) are the majority of victims of domestic and family violence and that it occurs within the wider context of social disadvantage and inequality experienced by women relative to men which, for some women, means that their vulnerability is heightened. Despite the increasingly conservative political environment, the gendered analysis remains a key plank from which domestic and family violence services frame their work (Murray, 2005; Webster, 2006).

Within a year of Elsie being set up, twelve domestic violence services had been established in Australia. At this time in Australia hundreds of women and children were turned away from the few existing refuges. While there is still unmet need, in 2005, across Australia there were 291 agencies providing crisis accommodation and related support services for women and children escaping domestic violence through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) at an annual cost of \$85.4 million (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005a, p. 7). Indigenous

women are over-represented in the female client group that access domestic violence SAAP services; in 2003-04 almost a quarter of all women accessing domestic violence SAAP services were Indigenous Australians (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2005b, p. 2).

Some accounts of the earliest established refuges have been written and provide a window into the histories of responses to domestic violence and homelessness in Australia (e.g. Johnson, 1981; Murray, 2002; Women's Liberation Half-Way House Collective, 1977). As well, there has been some documentation of the histories of the wider refuge movement (e.g., Orr, 1994; McGregor & Hopkins, 1991). Various government-funded reviews have also considered the work of refuges (e.g., McFerren, 1987; Chesterman, 1988) and there has been analysis of the relationship between domestic violence services and the state including that by McFerren (1990), Melville (1998) and Weeks & Gilmore (1996).

While many of the earliest refuges established from the 1970s were set up by groups of feminists, others were established by church-based organisations or groups of community minded citizens, not necessarily feminist in their orientation. Hence, while feminism has influenced domestic violence policy and service delivery, not all members of the women's refuge movement have shared feminist beliefs, particularly in the early years of the movement. The ability of these diverse groups to cooperate and form strategic coalitions to successfully influence public policy is a significant achievement of the women's refuge movement. Since the 1980s, in most states and territories and nationally, peak bodies, despite limited funding to support their activities, have worked with their member organisations advocating to government (e.g., Women's Council for Domestic and Family Violence Services (WA), 2006). Domestic and family violence services also have key roles in the integration of the delivery of services across the domestic violence service system (Department for Community Development, 2006; Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Family Violence, 2005).

The current domestic and family violence services include crisis and transitional accommodation services, as well as outreach, support, advocacy and specialist children's services. While there are common service delivery issues faced by agencies across Australia, there is also considerable diversity among the states and territories and between urban and rural locations in relation to service models, staffing and programs. For example, among refuge services, there are now communal homes as well as cluster-style units and dispersed housing. Other models include shop-fronts, lone outreach workers and specialist children's counselling services (Weeks & Oberin, 2004).

In a survey of domestic and family violence services across Australia, Weeks & Oberin (2004, p. 3)

found that while the implementation of service responses to domestic and family violence had been 'impressive', there remained outstanding issues including the need for an increased range of services and better accessibility and responsiveness of services, at least partly related to funding and resource issues. A major issue for domestic and family violence services is that demand for services continues to outstrip the available resources. In particular, Weeks & Oberin (2004) expressed concern about the practice of women and children being accommodated unsupported in motels when there are no beds available in refuges and Kirkwood (2006) identified the need for better resourcing of both immediate crisis support and longer term support.

Other barriers to effective service delivery include the lack of culturally relevant models and difficulties in accessing affordable long-term housing. Additional resources for rural and remote areas, especially for Indigenous women and children, further services for children and the expansion of specialist cultural programs, and services for young women and women with disabilities have all been identified as matters that require attention (Jennings, 2003; New South Wales Women's Refuge Resource Centre et al, 2001; Weeks & Oberin, 2004). The changes to family law and the implications for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence is another issue of concern.

While much has been achieved in the past three decades, as noted by Weeks & Oberin (2004, p. 125), 'challenging and preventing violence and women and children must remain a primary goal of governments and communities'. The women's refuge movement continues to work to achieve this goal and to remind others of its importance.

**References are available in full on the Parity web site.**

## Footnotes

1. Typically, in Australia, the 'women's refuge movement' is now talked about in terms of domestic and family violence services (rather than 'refuges', or 'shelters' as they are known in some Australian states) reflecting the much greater diversity in service models and programs now than in the earlier days of the movement. For ease of discussion, at times I refer to the 'women's refuge movement' in acknowledgement of its history and, at other times, 'domestic and family violence services', to better reflect the current state of the sector.
2. Historically the Australian women's refuge movement referred to violence between intimate partners as domestic violence and this specific form of violence was its primary concern. In more recent times, there have been changes in the use of terminology. While many in the sector continue to use the term 'domestic violence', in some states and territories, 'domestic and family violence' (or 'family violence') have been adopted to acknowledge that violence may be perpetrated by intimate partners as well as other family and community members, in particular, in relation to Indigenous women. In this article I use 'domestic and family violence' and 'domestic violence' interchangeably. See MacDonald (1998) for further discussion of language used around domestic and family violence.

# Why I Work with the Elderly Homeless

By Bryan Lipmann,  
 AM, CEO, Wintringham

I never cease to be amazed at the role chance plays in determining people's lives.

Although I made the decision to work with homeless people, I had never contemplated that that I would work primarily with the elderly. Indeed for my first few months as a social worker, I worked with street kids in Fitzroy Street St Kilda.

The chance event that awakened my interest, and then passion, to attempt to try to change the conditions that the elderly homeless were living in, was an incident affecting my father.

It was 1986 and I was working at Gordon House. My wife and I had decided to take my Mum and Dad to see Circus Oz. As I was leaving work on the Friday night, the nurse at Gordon House called out to say that two men had just suffered heart attacks. He asked if I would help him get them to Prince Henry's Hospital. I rang my wife and asked her to pick up my parents and take them to Circus Oz and that I would meet them there later.

Meanwhile we took the two men to Prince Henry's. If there is anything good that has happened in the last 20 years, then the closure of Prince Henry's is certainly one of them. After much arguing and discussion with the hospital, they eventually admitted both men. I then went off to Circus Oz, where unbelievably, my father himself had a heart attack. We managed to get him out of the tent and into a taxi and then to St Vincent's Hospital. They admitted Dad and shortly afterwards when they realised he had health insurance, they transferred him to the private section of the hospital. There he stayed for about 10 days where they did every test known to modern medicine, treated him wonderfully well and eventually discharged him. Dad lived for another 9 years before dying of an illness unrelated to his heart problem.

When I got back to work on the following Monday morning, both of the two men we had taken to Prince Henry's were found dead in their rooms at Gordon House. Both had been discharged by Prince Henry's immediately after we had admitted them to hospital — in fact I later learned that one of the men was back at Gordon House before I had even got to Circus Oz! It was clear that at least one of the men had died a horrific death, as he had partly fallen from his bed and in a confusion of tangled sheets, faeces and urine, had struggled to his death.

The lesson was clear: anyone who thinks that in Australia you can get equal access to health care (or as I was later to learn, aged care services) is simply living in cloud cuckoo land. It just doesn't happen: wealth buys access to services.

Over the following months I began to notice more and more of these quiet and almost feral elderly men, and occasionally women, who were living at Gordon House. As I began to become aware of the extent and range of excellent aged care services in the community, I became increasingly puzzled and then angry: why weren't homeless people accessing these services? Another side of the story was harder to explain and understand: why were the homeless services themselves content (or was it merely resigned to the fact?) that the elderly homeless were living in their shelters?

More than 20 years later I still don't know the answer — or if I do, it is more of a realisation that there is no one single answer, but rather that something like an answer can be found in an unfortunate amalgam of aged care industry prejudice, appalling hypocrisy on the part of church based aged care services, the paternalistic views of homeless service providers and the overworked and stressed homeless service workers who were forced to concentrate on crises to the exclusion of preventative care.

Over the next year or two I started to become aware of how many appalling stories of injustice and outrage had led these elderly people to seek shelter in a homeless persons' service. An incoherent elderly man had been discharged from hospital to Gordon House (he had never previously been there) with both arms in plaster casts. None of the staff had ever heard of him and none of us were alerted by the hospital to his arrival. It was only by accident that we discovered him in a room the booking clerk had allocated to him — I'll leave it to your imagination to imagine what his casts looked like after he had wiped himself when he went to the toilet over the previous four days. We had men who had fought in wars only to end their days in the shelters. We had women who had been abandoned by their families and men who had been told they were drunks when in fact they were suffering from Parkinson's Disease. The list was endless. And all the while, aged care services refused our referrals, Geriatric Assessment Teams wouldn't come to Gordon House, and the homeless services themselves were reluctant to see the elderly homeless living anywhere other than in their services.

In spite of my growing passion for the rights of these forgotten elderly, I am under no illusion that without the establishment of the SAAP Nightshelter Redevelopment, the opportunity to devote 100% of my time to the elderly homeless would not have arisen.

The Redevelopment was a strange time to live through. The Department of Human Services (or Community Services Victoria as it was then known) has written their history of the Redevelopment. However, at some stage it would be interesting for someone from the sector who lived and worked

through this time to pen an alternative view. From someone who was nominally managing one of the service redevelopment teams, my memories of the period are ones of working in a fog, with a drip feed of information trickling down from the service CEO and CSV managers. Projects we worked on were scuttled or promoted according to agendas that when they weren't constantly changing, were certainly clouded in a veil of mystery and machination.

We lurched from moments of excitement and exhilaration as we opened up new projects. We felt that we were all working towards a common end, namely the closure of the terrible shelters and their replacement with modern services that would at last bring some form of justice to the homeless. Similarly we fell prey to moments of deep despair as we realised that our moments of exhilaration were accidental and often misinterpreted as being something other than a simple grab by the homeless agencies to secure more services and power and to prevent any form of mainstreaming of the rights of homeless people.

If we despaired at the speed with which the large homeless agencies were being dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century, we were only partly mollified by the knowledge that in other states there was no attempt at even pretending that they would be reforming their services.

Eventually however, improvements were made. The Salvation Army started to employ more non-Salvationists to manage their services and ending up closing down The Gill and building Flagstaff. St Vincent's de Paul partially redeveloped Ozanam and they too professionalised its services. Hanover closed Gordon House and opened Haig Street amongst other services. These were major achievements as any visit to Sydney will continue to demonstrate.

To return to the plight of the elderly homeless; while the Redevelopment did not directly impact on the establishment of Wintringham, it did however create an environment where it was possible to contemplate the possibility that there could be a better way of doing things. What we didn't realise, which in hindsight can only be excused through naivety, was how hard some in the homeless sector would fight to prevent a new competitor entering the field.

Yet in spite of this obstruction, which was eventually to lead to the realisation that we would only progress services for the elderly homeless by creating a new company with its own staff, directors and leadership, support was found and in the most surprising places. Nowhere was this support stronger than from the Brotherhood of St Laurence through its CEO Peter Hollingworth and his senior managers, and in particular through John Wise.



Chance had again intervened, for without the support of Peter and the massive credibility and respect that he commanded in the 1980's in Melbourne, and the enthusiastic support of the then Federal Aged Care Minister, Peter Staples, Wintringham would have struggled to be anything other than an idea that had come at the wrong time and place.

While we have had people who have periodically provided great support and encouragement, the Commonwealth Department of Ageing (in all its various name changes) have been unfaltering in their support. A huge array of bureaucrats over the 20 years have shown consistent and at times, quite remarkable flexibility in helping adjust a system that was designed for mainstream elderly people to meet the needs of the homeless. We have argued all along that our clients are elderly and homeless

and not homeless and elderly. This paradigm shift focuses us and the Department on the rights of elderly homeless people to access mainstream aged care funding. For a similar reason, Wintringham has never asked or accepted a dollar of SAAP funding.

I continue to work with elderly homeless men and women because I still consider it to be an absolute disgrace that a rich and affluent society can turn its back on its aged and impoverished when they are at their most vulnerable. I still get upset and angry when I see commercial interests, whether they be ruthless boarding house landlords or avaricious Boards of Directors running some church based concessionally taxed aged care services, being allowed to overturn the rights of the elderly poor. I get equally upset and angry when we hear of services that are delivered to elderly homeless people in a degrading and paternalistic manner,

such as forcing a homeless person to attend a church service before they are fed.

Services to homeless elderly men and women have improved — at least in Melbourne. Although it is still difficult to have referrals accepted by mainstream aged care services, it is somewhat easier than it was in the 1980's. Homeless service providers themselves are now far more likely to refer elderly clients directly to Wintringham or other providers working with the aged homeless, and less likely to try to retain these elderly folk. From a service delivery perspective, it is clear that moving away from a total reliance on SAAP into the far better resourced Aged Care industry has been prudent. Nevertheless, the problem of chronic underfunding, particularly with regard to capital resourcing, continues to prevent the expansion of desperately needed services. ■



# The Freedom to Sleep: A History from the Long Grass in Darwin, Northern Territory

By Bill Day\*  
 Photos by Bill Day

In 2006 a conflict over the colonisation of Aboriginal land is being played out in public view in the streets and parks of the City of Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory. Refusing to be marginalised, the 'long grass' people are making a stand in the face of a booming property market that has threatened their camps and made their land a commodity. An earlier Aboriginal resistance began in 1869 after an armed expeditionary force surveyed the town site to satisfy speculators who had paid for unseen estates and were growing impatient for their title deeds. Although few of the surveyed properties were ever occupied by the purchasers, native title judgments have ruled that the sales effectively dispossessed the Aboriginal landowners.

The struggle for an Aboriginal presence on the ground in this northern enclave of settled Australia is disguised in the media as an 'itinerant problem', providing a regular election beat-up 'to rid the streets of long grass people,' as homeless Aborigines are often now called. Election campaigns against 'antisocial behaviour' and long grassers play upon voters' racial anxieties and have therefore been described as 'dog whistle campaigns,' although the terms are deliberately racially non-specific. A recent exception to the dehumanised and anonymous 'itinerant' was an interview in the media with the Aboriginal actor, David Gulpill at his camp hidden on the slopes behind the Darwin Magistrates Court.

'Long grass' is a regional term, taken from the spear grass that grows more than two metres tall on vacant land around Darwin in the monsoon months from October to April. The long grass then dries and is flattened by late storms and is usually incinerated in dry-season burn-offs. Cleared patches in the grass could be used for hidden or illegal drinking sessions or as places to sleep for people threatened by race or vagrancy laws. Since drinking rights were granted to NT Aboriginal people, drunkenness decriminalised and vagrancy laws abolished, the 'long grassers' have moved into the parks, beaches, scrub thickets and neglected buildings around the town. These sites are preferred to the spear grass where breezes are stifled, insects thrive and sometimes lives are lost in grass fires.

Aboriginal camps around Darwin are not a new phenomena. As the anthropologist, W. E. Stanner wrote: 'For every Aborigine who had Europeans thrust upon them, at least one other had sought them out.' From the earliest times, many Aboriginal people had chosen to migrate to the growing town. Last

century the Protector of Aborigines had advocated the creation of Aboriginal reserves to slow the migration to Territory urban centres, in conjunction with laws restricting Aboriginal movement in towns. By 1911, many of the local Larrakia people, hinterland groups and their children were confined to Darwin's notorious Kahlin Compound.

The policy of discouraging Aboriginal movement into towns was subverted by the resultant shortage of cheap domestic labour. Following increased opportunities and expectations after the Second World War, a welfare officer described a population of 400 'homogeneous people from all tribes' living in the Darwin camps. In the camps he observed the adaptation of Aboriginal traditions to the urban landscape, where localities had become the domain of distinct language groups. Despite the need for labour, in 1957 the officer recounted an early morning 'muster' of the camps to remove the 'down and outs' to a waiting ship where their names were recorded 'so that the Director of Native Affairs could commit them to an Aboriginal reserve.'

In 1951 a southern newspaper carried a series of reports on strikes by Aboriginal workers in Darwin. The articles described Darwin's Aborigines as 'hewers and drawers,' and noted that employers 'would resent any suggestion that all town natives should be sent to bush settlements away from the doubtful benefits of white civilisation.' A local commented: 'I can imagine the shriek that would go up from senior public servants and business men if that became policy.' In camps a few miles from Darwin the reporter interviewed 'natives living in conditions of such squalor, filth and abasement as defy open description.'

Until the 1970s, similar urban Aboriginal camps were tolerated as part of the Darwin scene. In the subsequent economic boom, the Darwin suburbs began to spread rapidly, coinciding with an increasing assertiveness by the Darwin homeless, encouraged by the national movement for land rights and the liberation movements of the times. In 1971 several Darwin fringe camps formed a coalition that they called 'Gwalwa Daraniki', or 'our land', and began demanding ownership of their scattered illegal urban bushland campsites. The militancy of the homeless in their dramatic protests illustrated that authorities could not assume that the Darwin camps could be bulldozed for new housing estates.

Coincidentally, it was not until the ubiquitous 'native camps' asserted some rights to their land that homeless Aboriginal people became increasingly known in the media as 'itinerants', 'transients' or more recently,

'long grassers'. At the same time, the few predominantly alcoholic non-Aboriginal 'long grassers' had been superseded in the public imagination by the 'hippies' who made their camps on jungle fringed beaches overlooking Darwin's scenic harbour. By then, the term 'long grasser' to describe a homeless person seemed destined to fade from memory as a relic of Darwin's shanty town origins.

As Darwin grew to a modern city, facilities and home ownership increased to the extent that residents who previously identified with southern states began to view Darwin as their home. Many seemed to ignore the fact



Homeless Aboriginal people at their camp at a secret location on the outskirts of Darwin, April 2006



that Aboriginal people had been living in the area for countless generations before them. Only after a few urban Aboriginal communities gained recognition as designated 'town camps,' did the Darwin media begin to refer to the remaining anonymous and voiceless campers as 'transients' or 'itinerants'. The terms deftly avoid any association with dispossession or the specific needs of homeless Aboriginal people and satisfy a supposed desire not to appear racist. By 1996, it was no coincidence that the Darwin City Council harassment of 'itinerants' began with the launch of the 'Clean Up Australia' campaign.

A House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs inquiry into fringe dwelling Aboriginal communities had categorised homeless Aborigines in towns as 'permanents', 'transients' and 'homeless drifters'. By 1992, another Parliamentary report used anthropological descriptions of Aboriginal mobility patterns to stress a 'complex and purposeful itinerancy' that fulfils obligations and maintains links

between people along a 'beat'. The well-meaning report discusses Aboriginal itinerancy as a natural condition, a cultural continuity of people who were 'itinerant in this country prior to British colonisation.' There have been many occasions when camps have been dismantled by the authorities, further giving the camps an air of impermanence.

The founder of the Longgrass Association, a Larrakia woman, saw things differently in an ABC television documentary in 2004. She said: 'Well, for a start, they really need to look very closely at human rights issues. The right for our people to move about the country. At the moment, they're treating people like cattle, dumb animals that are just wandering around aimlessly and don't know what they're doing. And they're moving them on. We must, as a national voice, take up the initial thing, which is, as Indigenous people to this country, we have a right to live the way we want to live. And if we choose not to live in a box. Well, then, that's our choice.'

Various questionnaires confirm that Aboriginal campers in Darwin value their closeness to the soil on which most of them by necessity sleep, as confirmation of their Aboriginality. Their lifestyle demonstrates that they belong to the land. As one man told me, 'My mother put me on the ground. My mattress was paperbark — not bed like Whiteman'. However, being harassed from place to place 'like dingo, like wallaby,' as they claim, suggests to Aborigines that they are not regarded as human. Survivors who walked hundreds of kilometres into Darwin in the 1950s to join the town workforce resent being told by politicians who may be relative newcomers that they do not belong in Darwin. Others explain why they prefer camping. One elderly man said: 'We like to live in the bushes, we don't like to live in the town. Like, when we get a house, all the young boys and young girls, they break everything. I was get three times house in Palmerston, and the Housing Commission kick me out — me and my wife. And I said, 'No more'.







In the past, many Aboriginal town camps included representatives of the traditional owners, the Larrakia people. Following the remarkable revival amongst a new generation of Larrakia, the tribe has been assigned to manage the NT and Commonwealth Government-sponsored 'Community Harmony Project' that professes concerns about the health and well-being of 'itinerants and the anti-social behaviour of some members of this group.' Point 8 of a list of 'Cultural Protocols' states: 'Visitors are responsible for their behaviour and should respect guidance of Larrakia,' While Point 9 states: 'Inappropriate behaviour reflects badly on Larrakia people and we do not accept it.' Although there is recognition of accommodation needs, Larrakia programs avoid the term 'homeless', preferring the term 'itinerant' popularised by the media.

Apart from the Longgrass Association, Darwin has seen at least two longgrass magazines, several longgrass video documentaries and there is a longgrass web site. Two successful 'Freedom to Sleep' overnight protests outside Parliament House

have resulted in the production of a 'Longgrass CD' compiled by homeless people in conjunction with well-known musicians. Obviously, from these examples their is acceptance amongst the homeless who have claimed 'long grass' with some pride as their own. Although they have stood strong in the face of repeated election promises to 'clean up Darwin,' like homeless people everywhere the stoicism and humour of the 'long grass people' belies the tragedy of their shortened lives while the ever-spreading city deprives them of their camps. ■

*\*Dr Bill Day is the author of Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement. Aboriginal Studies Press 1994, describing the campaign by a coalition of homeless Aborigines for space in the City of Darwin from 1971 to 1985. His PhD thesis is titled: Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin: Cultural persistence or a culture of resistance? University of Western Australia, 2001. He has been working for Aboriginal organisations in Tom Price, WA, for the last five years.*

Committed long grasser, Len Stewart peers out from his long grass camp

near Darwin April 2006

An edition of Longgrass





# The Bigger Picture: Australian Homelessness Legal Advocacy

By Cassandra Goldie\* #

Historically, in Australia, there has been a tendency for legal functionaries to see the 'problem' of 'homelessness' as an area where the law has little to offer. Homelessness has more typically been perceived as a 'non-legal' welfare problem, linked to lack of employment, abuse of alcohol, mental health issues, and other individual circumstances rather than the result of a lack of protection of basic human rights and a legal regime that fails to protect those rights. This attitude is likely due to a range of features of the legal profession and legal frameworks in Australia: a general lack of understanding about international and comparative human rights law; restrictions on the statutory legal aid system, as demonstrated by my own personal legal aid experience; the lack of a bill of rights in Australia; and a legal profession that largely reflects the broader community attitudes towards people who are homeless.

Even in human rights areas of legal practice and advocacy, homelessness has often been seen as an issue confined to economic, social and cultural rights discourse, in particular the 'right to adequate housing' contained in Article 11 of the *International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights*.<sup>1</sup> Economic, social and cultural human rights, including the right to adequate housing, have not been comprehensively incorporated into the domestic legal system of Australia.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, in Australia, homelessness has been too easily dismissed as a problem not amenable to legal intervention at the domestic level.

Community and welfare groups have also seen the legal system as a tool of oppression of people who are homeless, rather than as a tool for change.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, links between legal functionaries and community activists had not been developed and consolidated. Until recently, there had been relatively limited debate in Australia amongst legal functionaries or community activists about the legal and human rights of people facing homelessness, and how people might pursue those rights to assert greater control and legitimacy, inside and out of the domestic courts and at international level. There have also been scarce efforts by legal aid services to provide specialist legal assistance and advocacy for people experiencing homelessness.

In 1975, Justice Ronald Sackville delivered his seminal report, *Homeless People and the Law*. Over the years, significant papers and reports have been written, particularly the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission National Inquiry into Homeless

Children,<sup>4</sup> and there have been important legal and social campaigns in support of people facing homelessness, such as the Rent Watchers campaign leading up to the 2000 Olympics in Sydney,<sup>5</sup> and the campaign against loitering offences in Port Kembla.<sup>6</sup> However, most early debates were absent a human rights analysis and reports and campaigns tended to be localised endeavours without the capacity to continue a broader campaign of community and legal activism seeking to define and secure legal protection of the basic human rights of people facing homelessness.

## The Development of Specialist Legal Services for People who Are Homeless

In 1999, Caitlin English the then Executive Director of the Public Interest Law Clearinghouse (PILCH) in Melbourne, Victoria, travelled to the United States as part of a Churchill Fellowship to study the delivery of pro bono legal services in public interest cases for people who are poor and marginalised. PILCH was established in 1995 as a clearinghouse for pro bono services, basing itself on innovative models in the US.<sup>7</sup> The English study concluded that 'the United States was considerably further advanced in the provision of pro bono services than we were in Australia' and noted 'the leadership role of the American Bar Association in developing Bar pro bono schemes throughout the country.'<sup>8</sup>

As part of her tour through the US, English visited a number of specialist pro bono schemes for people experiencing homelessness, including Volunteer Lawyers for the Homeless established by the Legal Assistance Fund with 70 private attorneys attending homeless shelters and one LAF staff attorney to supervise, and the Public Counsel — Homelessness Prevention Law Project, which provided outreach services to people using homelessness services, drawing on summer clerks from the Public Interest Project at UCLA. English subsequently also highlighted the work of the National Law Centre on Homelessness and Poverty, the 'Adopt a Shelter' program in Hollywood and Santa Monica, the Homeless Youth Project in Los Angeles, and the Lawyers Clearinghouse on Affordable Housing and Homelessness in Boston. She urged 'Australian lawyers and community advocates seeking to increase the rights and legal services to homeless people [to] benefit from examining further the activities of public interest lawyers in this field in the United States.'<sup>9</sup> A key finding

from the English study was that 'the location of services at the point of contact with homeless or at risk groups was the most effective way of providing legal services to the homeless.'<sup>10</sup>

In response to the findings of the English study, in October 2001, the first Homeless Persons Legal Clinic was established by PILCH in Melbourne, Victoria in partnership with the Council to Homeless Persons, the peak advocacy group for homelessness services and people who are homeless in Victoria.<sup>11</sup> The Clinic commenced as a 52 week project, involving delivery of legal services through two Clinics, based at welfare agencies, with legal assistance provided by private law firms on a pro bono basis. The Clinic was explicitly 'based on similar schemes in the United States which have proved of considerable worth to homeless people in dealing with the civil legal issues which may impact on their ability to access accommodation, employment or social security payments.'<sup>12</sup> The Clinic made an important commitment to training legal practitioners and welfare agency staff to increase the success of the integration between the work of agencies and the relevance of the law to supporting people who are homeless.

The Clinic has grown into a well-established and highly respected legal service provider as well as a strong and effective advocate for the legal and human rights of people who are homeless. The Clinic provides legal services at seven welfare agencies<sup>13</sup> through weekly clinics staffed by pro bono lawyers from eight law firms.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Clinic has been active in policy and law reform work, with significant impact. The success of the Homeless Persons Legal Clinic in Melbourne, Victoria has now been the catalyst for similar initiatives in another four of the seven jurisdictions in Australia.

On 10 December 2002, the Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House (QPILCH) launched the Brisbane-based Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic as a six-month pilot project based on the Melbourne model.<sup>15</sup> The Coordinator and Solicitor for the Clinic was originally a part-time seconded employed solicitor from private law firms.<sup>16</sup> In September 2005, QPILCH was successful in receiving a one year grant from the Queensland Department of Communities in order to expand its services and employ a full-time solicitor. The Clinic provides pro bono legal help from seven legal clinics operated at a range of welfare and emergency accommodation centres.<sup>17</sup> There are ten participating law firms and legal assistance is provided in all areas of law (with limited services in criminal and family law matters).<sup>18</sup> The Clinic is also involved in community

education and training activities and systemic advocacy and law reform initiatives, as well as providing ongoing training to participating pro bono solicitors. The Clinic is 'the first legal service in Queensland which is specifically designed to address the legal needs of homeless people.'<sup>19</sup>

In May 2004, the New South Wales Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Public Interest Law Clearinghouse also set up a Homeless Persons Legal Service, based in Sydney. The Service was again modelled on the Victorian and Queensland Clinics although the specific design was informed by a detailed consultation process with a wide range of community and legal groups. The Service received twelve months funding support from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services under the National Homelessness Strategy and the Public Purposes Fund administered by the New South Wales Attorney-General's Department. It relies on pro bono services from seven private law firms,<sup>20</sup> providing legal help from six community locations.<sup>21</sup> As with its counterparts in other States, the Service has also been actively involved in systemic legal and policy research and advocacy.<sup>22</sup>

In Perth, Western Australia, the first steps have now been taken to set up a specialist Homeless Persons Legal Clinic. In October 2004, Labor Lawyers (Western Australia) and Human Rights WA held a public forum on "Homelessness and the Law", opened by the Hon Chief Justice David Malcolm, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of WA and addressed by Philip Lynch, Coordinator of the PILCH Homeless Persons Legal Clinic in Melbourne, Victoria. Arising out of that Forum, a funding application to establish a Perth-based Clinic was submitted to the Attorney General of Western Australia. The application was

declined in favour of a small grant for a Scoping Study to be conducted. The initiative is now being driven by an informal Steering Committee of volunteers, and supporters, in collaboration with private law firm Blake Dawson Waldron. The Scoping Study will assess the legal needs of people who are homeless with a view to formulating recommendations about the model for a specialist service that would be suitable for local conditions.

Finally, in South Australia, a coalition has been formed to develop a specialist legal service for homeless people, again inspired by the success of the services in Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales.<sup>23</sup> The Coalition recently sought \$AU 80 000 from the South Australian government to establish the Clinic but, despite the support of the South Australian Council of Social Services and Homelessness SA, the funding application has been declined. Efforts continue.

At around the same time as the first specialist legal service for homeless people was created in Melbourne, Victoria, the Asia Pacific Programme of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) opened its doors in Napier Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Victoria in 2000. COHRE is an international human rights non-governmental organisation that specialises in the international human right to adequate housing. The COHRE Asia Pacific Programme was established by Ken Fernandes, a long time housing rights community activist, originally from Pakistan with a history of working with local communities in a wide range of countries. COHRE's presence in Australia has acted as an additional catalyst bringing a strong human rights-based perspective to a wide range of initiatives to promote access to justice for people who are homeless. The

role of COHRE in Australia has been complemented by the presence of Alison Aggarwal in Sydney from 2003, as Research Assistant to the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing on women and housing rights.

Since 2000, there has been an explosion in publications and academic interest regarding the legal and human rights issues experienced by people who are homeless. On a recent count, prior to the year 2000, about ten journal articles and publications had been published by Australians dealing with legal and human rights concerns associated with homelessness, with only one article published prior to the 1990s.<sup>24</sup> Since 2000, at least 60 articles have gone to print!<sup>25</sup> Over the last five years, papers, forums and training courses have been delivered in a range of contexts<sup>26</sup> and in 2003, the Homelessness Legal Rights Project was established at the Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law, University of New South Wales involving maintenance of a web site and publication of e-bulletins dealing specifically with the Australian legal and human rights of people facing homelessness.<sup>27</sup> ■

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# This is a very much abridged version of a much longer article "Using the Law and Human Rights to Challenge Injustice for People who are Homeless: An Australia Story" that will be available in full on the Parity section of the CHP Web Site





# South Australian Housing Policy: Retrospective/Prospective.

By David Kilner\*

## Introduction

This paper is based on my book *Housing Policy in South Australia since White Settlement* which is fully referenced.<sup>1</sup> Therefore I have avoided the use of references in this article. The article focuses on the South Australian experience.

## Purpose

My purpose in this article is to explore several themes:

- The large scale public investment in housing we once had in South Australia
- Why we had that investment
- How we benefited from it
- How we lost it
- Is there a chance we could get it back?

And to ask:

- Have we focussed too much on a welfare argument when what is needed is a broader social and economic framework as well as welfare solutions to housing issues?

## When have Housing Programs been supported in South Australia?

Housing Programs in South Australia since 1910 have attracted strongest public and political support when they have been couched as broad-based programs, in particular consumer or social programs, industry and economic programs, or programs rewarding war service, but less so as focused welfare programs.

The earliest programs date to 1910. Up to about 1935 programs expanded home ownership and were supported for a number of reasons:

- To fight broad-based housing crises eg high rents; inadequacies in the finance sector; low housing standards; and to address health issues
- As a bulwark against socialism or capitalism
- To build citizenship, good workers, family life, thrift and to uplift society
- To reward service eg War Service Homes to reward service in World War I
- To promote social stability and contentment
- To enhance the home as the economic centre of consumerism in the electric age.

From about 1936 onwards, and particularly after the Second World War, new reasons were advanced to support housing programs:

- As a response to market failure (eg the aftershocks of the Depression)
- As a response to crisis eg World War II
- To promote economic management and growth
- To assist industrial development and urbanisation
- To develop mature private markets eg land, finance
- To contain private sector prices through public sector competition.

## The Current Problem

Until the early 1990's housing policy had a high profile in South Australia. Housing investment (both public and private) was high and included both public housing and

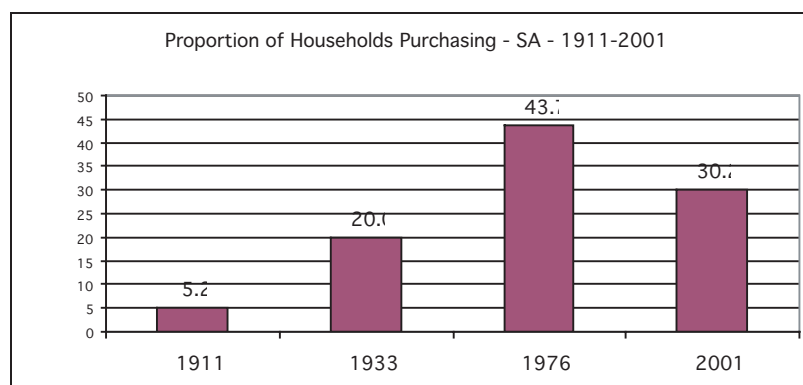
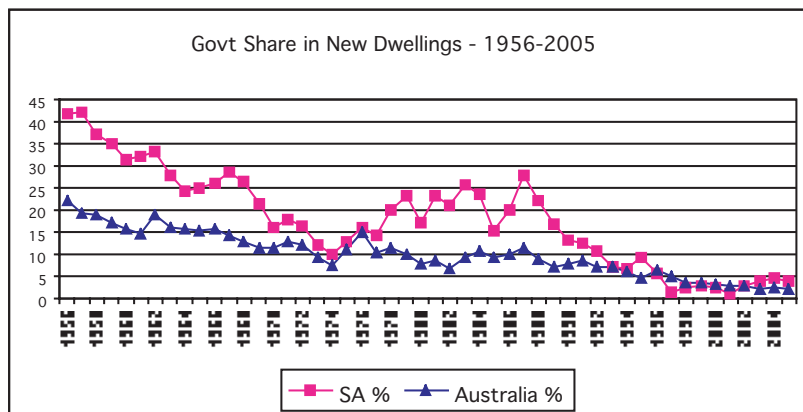
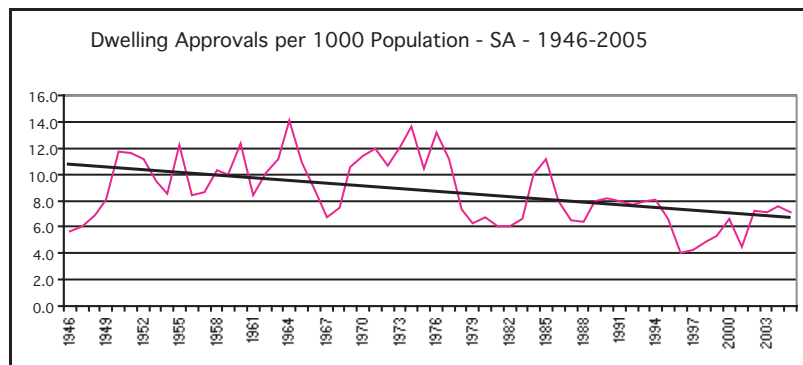
home ownership tenures. There was a focus on family housing for working people between 1936 and the nineteen seventies, although housing for the elderly was also supported. Housing needs were increasingly being met, both general and special needs. Since the early 1990s public investment has declined dramatically.

## The Background to Housing Investment

The following charts illustrate the pattern of housing investment in South Australia since World War Two.

The charts are:

1. All dwelling approvals in South Australia from 1946 to 2005 per 1000 mean population



2. Government share in dwelling completions from 1956 to 2005
3. Number of purchasing households 1911-2001

## Comments

A number of comments can be made about these charts. Firstly, South Australia's dwelling approval rate was similar to the whole of Australia's, except after 1993 when it collapsed. Secondly, the recent housing 'boom' is illusory – the best level of output in the 'boom' was not much better than the troughs of the preceding period. Thirdly, it can also be seen that in South Australia, the government contribution to new housing up to 1990 was about twice the national level – an indicator of the importance of government support to South Australian industry and the community. Including home ownership, government funded nearly 50% of new dwellings in South Australia between 1946 and 1980. Until 1953 all public housing money used in South Australia was State or local money. The State did not begin using Commonwealth funds until 1953. Net State indebtedness averaged about 20% of GDP during this period. Since about 2000, this has been insignificant, despite recent decisions to expand infrastructure expenditure.

## Factors Driving Post-War Strategies

A number of factors drove South Australia's post-War housing strategies. There was an initial catch-up effect after the Depression and the War, both of which reduced housing investment to very low levels. There was also a growth philosophy – grow population; grow jobs; grow investment. It was considered that housing investment had a key role to play in this growth philosophy. There was also plenty of opportunity eg plentiful land, easy foreign investment, and low interest rates. Moreover, public housing was seen as a productive social and economic asset not as a cost. Home ownership was also seen in this light. State investment in housing was conceived as a vital responsibility, underpinning expansion of industry and the social development of the community.

## Premier Playford's Economic Strategy

At the heart of these housing strategies lay the South Australian Government's economic strategy. This had a number of features:

- Offer cheap land, labour, credit and infrastructure to investors, thus giving the State a competitive edge compared to other investment options
- Build low cost workers' housing (rental and purchase) to keep money wages low and encourage investment
- Pursue foreign and national investment actively
- Actively manage land markets to bear down on costs

- Sustain economic growth through investment
- Foster urbanisation especially the growth of Adelaide
- Link investment, employment and urban development to the benefit of investors and workers
- Pursue active immigration policy to boost population.

There was a determination to make South Australia internationally competitive through creating a low-cost environment, and affordable housing was a key component of this.

## Effects

These strategies had a number of effects in the post-War period.

There was stronger economic growth than would otherwise have been the case. There was improved profitability for investors – because of the low cost structure. There was an improved equity of social outcomes through employment and affordable housing. There was a supportive, confident and optimistic population which believed in its future. There was also stronger population growth as illustrated in the following chart.

In the period up to 1969, South Australian population growth was ahead of the national figure. Indeed in the nineteen sixties, South Australia was the lead State for population growth for a while. Since then, South Australia has slipped far behind the rest of the country.

Another effect of these policies was that the social housing stock reached 12% of the total by 1991 – a level not reached by any other State in the Commonwealth. This created an unprecedented capacity to address housing problems. However, this capacity was simultaneously challenged and investment became unsustainable as the client base changed towards the welfare population in 1970's and 1980's. South Australia may have built its social housing stock too quickly, especially in the 1980s – there was a 50% increase in the public housing stock in the space of ten years. This was the fastest rate ever and was largely funded by government borrowings at the common public sector borrowing rate.

## Messages

A number of messages can be read from this analysis of post-War housing policy.

Firstly, Housing Programs attract better public and political support when they are couched as broad-based consumer, social, economic, industry or reward programs not as welfare programs. Public and political support for social housing has declined as the focus has moved away from a broad base towards an explicit welfare focus, especially in the last ten years. Secondly, population growth, jobs and housing investment interact and mutually support each other. Thirdly, as the stock of social housing expanded, there was a "coat-tails" effect for meeting welfare needs, with the sector better placed to respond to the needs of those worst off.

## Outcomes of Previous Policy

Previous policies – those in place until the early nineteen nineties – had several effects:

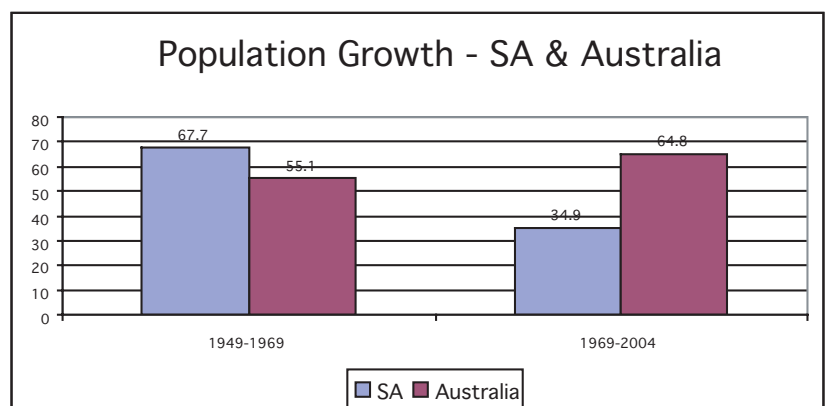
- There was a large stock of social housing to meet a diversity of housing need
- Housing was insulated from normal market forces eg interest rates and the competition for land
- South Australia had low poverty rates after deducting housing costs – the best pre/post drop in Australia
- Hence broad-based housing strategies also tackled homelessness.

The public debt incurred to build these outcomes was affordable if managed creatively and the clientele diversified, according to Treasury modelling in the early nineteen nineties. But this didn't happen, and the consequence was a debt crisis instead, triggering off a long decline in the public housing sector.

## How the Gains Were Lost

The positive outcomes of the post-War period have gradually been lost, for a variety of reasons.

The economic environment changed. The opportunities to attract foreign industrial investment behind Australia's tariff walls evaporated. The Australian economy was deregulated and opened up to the world, and interest rates were also deregulated. The level of special needs grew in the community with deinstitutionalisation, higher and longer-lasting unemployment and





familial and demographic change. Public housing became welfare housing as government perceptions of their role changed. Commonwealth loan finance became grants, meaning capital starvation and a focus on housing those in most need. The previous social housing financing system became unsustainable as a consequence.

There was a broader context of the State Bank collapse and the rise of economic rationalism.

It must also be asked if we failed to meet the needs of a broad enough cross-section of people through public housing in the nineteen eighties and nineties? By trying to meet the needs of the worst off too quickly, we created the potential for a financial collapse which in the long run undermined the capacity to help more of those in deep need. In other words, was the wrong stock provided to the wrong customer group in the wrong places? Perhaps an effort to keep on housing more working families would have left the social housing sector in better financial health, improved public acceptance and increased the capacity to help more in deep need over time as we were able to discharge previous debt.

In practice, despite debates within Treasury and the government housing policy arena, adaptation to new realities and possibilities was not made. The result was that the credibility and social appeal of public housing were lost in the nineteen nineties. As an illustration of this change, it can be said that in South Australia in 1960 a broad cross-section of the population wanted to buy or rent from the Housing Trust – by 1990 most of the community had lost this preference, as evidenced by research conducted by the housing authorities.

By the mid-nineties, debt reduction had become the imperative.

## Some Recent Trends

There have been a number of trends in recent years:

- The loss of Govt housing banks eg Savings Bank, State Bank
- The loss of state developers eg SA Urban Lands Trust
- The loss of co-operative financial institutions eg building societies
- The decline of social housing with the loss of over 10,000 units of accommodation since 1996.

There has been a slow decline of housing success, illustrated by the following chart.

Adelaide now has an urban growth boundary whose effects will be growing urban consolidation. There has been a severe loss of capital funding through the CSHA. We are currently privatising scarce public land as we shed public housing stock. Welfare housing has been in a downward spiral losing public support and (maybe) political support. 'Welfare' housing has been isolated from the mainstream (which is suicide). Along with other States and Territories, South

Australia has experienced rapid price inflation in housing and land markets.

On the other hand the new Housing Plan for South Australia, with its renewed emphasis on affordable housing for a broader cross-section of the population, is right in principle but under-resourced in practice.

## Recent and Current Policies

It must be asked if recent economic policies in South Australia are counter-productive, with a focus on debt reduction and budgetary restraint on the capital side. Economic growth, private investment and population growth are comparatively weak. We export our unemployment.

## Bring back the Ghosts?

Given this, is there a case for a new broad-based consumer, industry or reward housing program? Obviously there is no case for a large-scale reward-based program. There is a case for a broad-based consumer or social program, because the gains of the past are being lost and the force of events will demand a solution. To a degree there is a case for an industry program to take advantage of global investment patterns.

A new housing crisis is emerging with the following features:

- Falling access to home ownership
- Falling social housing stock
- Growing private rental market and rising rents
- Shrinking land supply and rising costs
- General inflation of house prices and rents, reducing social equity and leaving some households perilously placed if interest rates rise too much
- Excessive height, density and redevelopment of older areas due to the urban growth boundary
- Steeper urban price gradient and more social segregation
- Intergenerational disparities and conflict.

A new consumer/social program would have the following features:

- A mix of land, home ownership and rental strategies

- The aim should be anti-inflationary, to pressure prices and improve affordability and access
- Sustain viability of social housing through better social mix and new financial instruments
- Improvement of South Australia's competitive edge.

Lacking the attractions of other States, South Australia needs adequate social and physical infrastructure and affordable housing, to help compete with others.

## Challenges

These suggestions are against current wisdom which says - contain State debt to attract investment via a better credit rating. But historically and comparatively there is no evidence this works. What works is to look like a going concern with growth potential. A new broad-based housing program could be an important component of this rejuvenation.

However, we need to resolve how much needs-based housing we can afford at any given point in time. We have to get the numbers right — financial viability is the key to a successful social housing system. But there is more than one road to viability (Treasury officers developed an alternative to debt reduction in the nineties).

## Outcomes

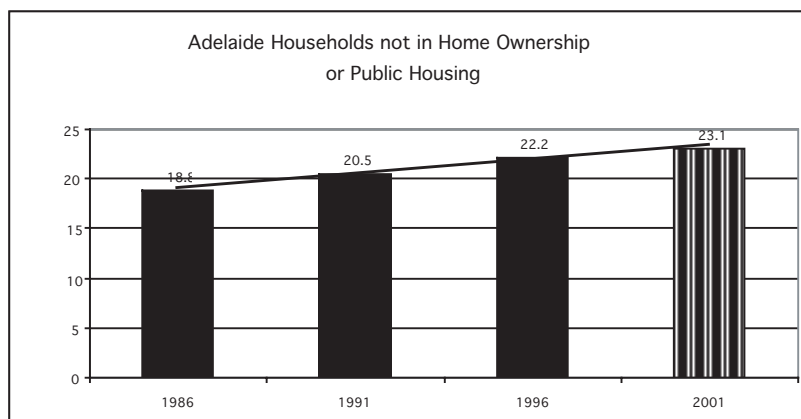
A new broad-based social housing program could have several outcomes:

- More affordable housing for whole community
- Public support — if it results in more jobs, higher standard of living, better housing outcomes
- The chance to provide more welfare outcomes within general housing policy. ■

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## Footnote

1. Kilner D., Housing Policy in South Australia since White Settlement, Digital Print Australia, Adelaide, 2005



# From 'Vagrant' to 'Nuisance': 200 Years of Public Space Law In Queensland

By Dr Tamara Walsh,  
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In 1931, the Queensland Parliament passed the *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act*, the object of which was stated to be 'to make better provision for the prevention and punishment of offences by vagrants and disorderly persons.' In 2005, the Queensland Parliament replaced this Act with the *Summary Offences Act*. While the word 'vagrant' was no longer used, the object of the Act was vastly similar: 'ensuring, as far as practicable, members of the public may lawfully use and pass through public places without interference from acts of nuisance committed by others' (emphasis added). It is not necessary to stretch one's imagination too far to determine who, in fact, these 'others' are. And recent history has shown that 'vagrants' and 'nuisances' are drawn from the same ranks.

## Homeless Persons as 'Vagrants'

The *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act* found its roots in medieval legislation, and was closely modelled on the *British Vagrants Act* of 1824. Historically, vagrants were confined to 'asylums' where they were demoralised and stigmatised, forced to work under extremely poor conditions, and removed from the 'delicate' eyes of the wider community.<sup>1</sup> Under the Queensland Act, 'vagrants' could be fined or imprisoned if they were found to be without visible lawful means of support, habitually drunk or begging.

Throughout the 20th century, the *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act* certainly had the effect of demeaning and restricting the lives of people experiencing homelessness in Queensland. Cases of homeless persons being charged with vagrancy for eating out of garbage bins, begging and sleeping out were not uncommon; in 1999/2000 for example, around 300 people were charged for being without lawful means or begging alone.<sup>2</sup>

Predictably, many of these people were Indigenous. While formal statistics on the Indigenous status of those charged were not collected, much of the reported case law concerned Indigenous people.<sup>3</sup> The *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act* thereby continued the legacy of the Queensland Aboriginal 'Protection Acts' that allowed for the exclusion of Indigenous people from public space and general social life.

## Homeless Persons as a 'Public Nuisance'

By 1993, it was formally recognised that the Act might not be suitable for continued enforcement in contemporary Queensland society. A Review Committee set up to make recommendations regarding the future of the *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act* explicitly stated that 'issues such as vagrancy are more adequately dealt with through welfare agencies rather than the criminal justice system.'<sup>4</sup> Yet, the Act continued in force. Ten years later, the newly formed Rights in Public Space Action Group (RIPS)<sup>5</sup> stepped up the campaign for the Act to be repealed.

In response, the government announced that a new (and long-awaited) Summary Offences Act would replace the *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act*. The *Summary Offences Act* 2005 promised to 'modernise' public space law and 'reflect community standards' while still 'helping police to intervene to prevent serious crime'; it was recognised that the term 'vagrant' itself was 'outdated' and 'based on obsolete English laws'<sup>6</sup>

The offence of vagrancy was thereby repealed, however, in effect, it was abolished in name alone. Instead, it was replaced by the offence of 'public nuisance' which allows police to arrest a person who acts in a disorderly or offensive manner in a public place where that behaviour interferes, or is likely to interfere, with the peaceful passage through, or enjoyment of, a public place by a member of the public. Further, separate offences of 'begging' and 'public drunkenness' were retained under the new Act, and police move-on powers (contained in a separate Act) were expanded to cover all of Queensland's public spaces.<sup>7</sup>

Many people experiencing homelessness continue to be prosecuted under the new *Summary Offences Act*. A recent study found that as many as 24% of public nuisance defendants coming before Magistrates' Courts in Queensland are homeless, and as many as 50% more are at risk of homelessness.<sup>8</sup> Further, the disproportionate impact of these kinds of laws on Indigenous people continues, with around 30% of public nuisance defendants (and as many as 70% in some regional jurisdictions) identifying as Indigenous.<sup>9</sup>

It seems, therefore, that the only difference between the Acts in practice is the extent to which society is deemed to condemn the behaviour of these 'others'; the maximum penalty for vagrancy under the old Act was a \$100 fine or six months' imprisonment, while the maximum penalty for 'public

nuisance' under the new Act is a \$750 fine or six months' imprisonment. In practice, penalties have indeed gone up; the average fine amount imposed for public nuisance is around \$210 with two months to pay. Further, an increasing number of public nuisance defendants are being committed to prison.<sup>10</sup>

## Vagrant or Nuisance? – The Result is the Same

While the repeal of the *Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act* was a welcome development in Queensland's public space law, its legacy of criminalising homelessness lives on. Arrests are still based on prejudice and a misunderstanding of the nature and causes of homelessness. Observation of the cases coming before the courts, and perusal of the judgements delivered, demonstrates that archaic, discriminatory attitudes towards homelessness still exist, despite 200 years of public space law history. The right of people experiencing homelessness to enjoy and use public space, as equal members of the public, is still not being recognised. Whether they are characterised as 'vagrants' or a 'nuisance', the result is the same: a fundamental violation of individuals' human rights and an affront to their dignity and self-respect. ■

### Footnotes

1. For a more thorough history of vagrancy, see Tamara Walsh, 'Waltzing Matilda One Hundred Years Later: Interactions Between Homeless Persons and the Criminal Justice System in Queensland' (2003) 25(1) *Sydney Law Review* 75.
2. *Ibid* at 79.
3. *Ibid* at 87.
4. Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act Review Committee, *Final Report to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services*, 1993 at 1.
5. RIPS is a coalition of community lawyers in Queensland committed to ensuring that marginalised people who access public spaces have the same rights and freedoms to enjoy those spaces as other community members; see [www.rips.asn.au](http://www.rips.asn.au).
6. The Hon Judy Spence MP, 'Spence reforms vagrants legislation', Media Statement, 27 September 2004.
7. See the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000* (Qld).
8. See Tamara Walsh, *No Offence: The Enforcement of Offensive Language and Offensive Behaviour Offences in Queensland*, 2006.
9. *Ibid* at 17.
10. *Ibid* at 31-32



# Whatever Happened to the Revolution? . . .

## Activism and the Early Days of Youth Refuges in NSW

By Michael Coffey,  
Executive Officer Youth  
Accommodation Association  
of NSW (YAA)

This article offers a snapshot and a story about the beginnings of Youth Accommodation Association (YAA) and of the first youth refuges in NSW in the 1970's. It traces the more 'activist' origins in the mid to late 1970's and refers to some of the key movers and shakers and events which transpired. It is a story written from a vantage point of an organisation which has been operating as the peak organisation for youth homeless organisations in NSW for well over 26 years and with an access to the archives which span this period.

In a recent celebration of YAA's history we invited comments from workers who had worked in the 70's and 80's. The following example, captures the more activist and radical beginnings of a 'youth refuge movement'.

*It's very important to recognise an acknowledgment that many of the workers in supported accommodation and housing politics and servicing were from backgrounds of radicalisation in broader struggles — women's rights, Aboriginal rights, gay and lesbian rights, and early environmental struggles: and it's important first to recognise that many of us who worked in the supported accommodation area also did considerable work in the housing sector being critically involved in the various versions of Shelter at State and national levels. It was this that led us to making the connections between the personal and the political when it came to looking at root causes of homeless among the young people we dealt with and to knowing that only operating on a case-work band aid approach was inadequate. We knew that we would get little unless the pillars of sexism, racism and homophobia were continually undermined in our relations with each other in the workplace, with our funders, and with young people . . .*

**Youth worker'**

The material here, (such as the above quote from a youth worker), was also used for the "Youth Homelessness Matters" re-animating "activism' presentation at the Fourth National Homelessness Conference held in Sydney in March 2006. Where the

National Youth Coalition of Housing (NYCH) traced how activism and advocacy has changed over the last few decades. It is sourced from the dusty archives of YAA, the NYCH and from people such as Narelle Clay, Laurie Matthews, Janet Ryan, David Annis Brown, Peter Cronau, Paul Van Ryk, Vaughan Bowie, Heather Kemp, Donna Curtis, Maria Leebeek and various people with sector memories. I have added additional material compiled from other sources such as "Youth in Australia: Policy Administration and Politics" by Irving, Maunders and Sherington<sup>2</sup> who tackle the history of youth organisations in Australia — as 'trainspotters' — with much more empirical rigour than I would care to muster. Interestingly, Irving et al describe YAA as a 'radical' organisation.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps in the mould of the naughty and political Eureka Youth League of the 1950s.

Youth homelessness has been a social issue in Australia since the beginning of white occupation, with pejorative terms such as 'street arabs' being used during the 19th and early 20th centuries to describe homeless young people. The Neglected and Criminal Children's Act 1864 which defined neglected children as

*"Any child found wandering about or frequenting any street thoroughfare tavern or place of public resort or sleeping in the open air and who should not have any home or settled place of abode or any visible means of subsistence."*<sup>4</sup>

Services for homeless young people over one hundred years ago centred on notions of apprehension and detention of children and young people, who were placed in reformatories or boarded out, a process known as 'child saving'. Governments acted as quasi parent where the state had powers to care for children who were deserted or abandoned, ill treated or found living on the streets. The model used was one of 'resocialising' young people to more productive ways of life and at its worst made the 'stolen generation' possible.

Prior to the 1970's the provision of services to the homeless was through state funded projects and the welfare work of the 'volunteer sector' and the church charities. While youth policy and affairs were mainly focused on the National Fitness program. In the early 1970's a new funded NGO community sector came online, energised by a new sense of community and spirit emerged in Australia, following a the passing of a repressive and extended liberal dynasty, with the progressive Whitlam led Labor Government and brief window of opportunity from 1972 to 1975.

It is also the time when new notions of youth work practice such as the logic of sub-cultural theory (aka Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) CCCS Birmingham. This marks a shift in youth work practice<sup>5</sup> away from youth as a problem or victim, or juvenile delinquent . . . towards the groovy rhetoric of empowerment, enabling independence, giving youth a voice and recognising sub-cultures.

The 1970's were exciting times to be young in NSW. In 1970 the first video game was released — Pong (Space Invaders came much later in 1978). In 1971 MacDonalds opened its first store in Australia at Yagoona. By 1973 18-year-olds were given the vote, Australia pulled out of the Vietnam, university fees were abolished. TAFE started in 1974. In 1975 young people in NSW got their own radio station 2JJ.

However, commentary tells us that from the mid 1970s on there was a significant increase in demand from homeless young people using night shelters or sleeping rough.

The *One Step Forward* report in 1982/83, noted

*"that much more was involved than a number of young people running away from home. The changing structure of economic and social life was thought to be exerting pressures beyond the control of the young and forcing them into homelessness".<sup>6</sup>*

The mid 70's the predominant assumption among policy makers was that the 1974-75 recession had caused a temporary youth unemployment problem. It was assumed that all that was required was a number of short-term "band-aids" to tide us over until full employment was restored.

In 1974 the Commonwealth introduced the Homeless Persons assistance Program (HPAP), which mainly went to the religious organisations for single homeless men, it also was used later to build youth refuges and shelters.

The first NSW youth refuge, Young Peoples Refuge, opened in February 1975 in Chippendale as a temporary alternative environment for young people. As an alternative to large state run institutional homes/remand centres or religious orgs which provided foster care services. In July 1976, Bankstown Youth Refuge and Taldemunde opened with funding described by the SMH as being on "an experimental basis".

From Peter Cronau's<sup>7</sup> notes that early youth refuges used the 'house parents' model, where the first refuge paradigm was that

their residents needed 'love' and 'restoration of family' they often employed house parents to do this. Apparently there was a rapid turnover of staff 'houseparents.' This was phased out over the years in preference for the 'youth worker' model.

Paul Van Ryk Notes that:

*"Many of us also had very strong critiques of the family as it was then socially constructed and again recognised the need to conduct work in questioning and challenging this construction, which at times put us at odds with other childrens and youth services, and certainly continually made us less than popular with governments and funders."*

In 1975 Shelter NSW and in 1976 the Tenants Union were established.

### Youth Refuges get funded

In 1979 the Commonwealth and States established a three year pilot Youth Services Scheme (YSS) to provide emergency accommodation, referral and info services to young people under 18 described as 'runaways' 'street kids'. This pilot extended to 5 years until SAAP was established. Prior to YSS some services had been funded through HPAP. <sup>8</sup> And some states such as NSW, SA and Victoria had developed separate youth accommodation programs. Prior to YSS, services responses were described as ad-hoc and the YSS was welcomed as an attempt towards providing some structure and consistency.

The introduction of YSS brought a new set of problems to the field services were uncoordinated, under funded and insufficiently spread in a geographical sense, there were wide disparities in funding levels. It was also realised that, for young people, income security needs were paramount and that after a short stay in emergency accommodation, there was nowhere else to go. Refuges were not the answer, and so an emphasis began to be given to public housing.<sup>9</sup>



Old YAA Logo

In 1981/82 YSS was evaluated and documented in "One Step Forward" and a senate inquiry into the needs of Homeless youth. Both emphasised the need for long term accommodation options for Young people. YSS continued in 1983/84 with a national budget of \$2.1million. The states and territories also provided \$5.9 million.

YAA established in NSW (first as YRAG, then YRA and YRAA and then YAA )

YAA began in 1979 as the Youth Refuge Action group, with 18 member services.<sup>10</sup> as a group of workers in services who got together to discuss problems, to break down the extreme isolation which existed between them, share information and support each other. YRAG was first located at Burnside Homes in Nth Parramatta.

Foundation members at the first meeting (on record) were:

- Annandale Young People's Refuge : Eva Shervashidze, Margaret Bail
- Bankstown Youth Refuge: Peter Holt, Chris Holt, Kerry May, Geoff Garnen, John
- Blacktown Youth Refuge : Peter Cronau, Lesley Moore
- Fairfield Youth Refuge: Steve Warren
- Kings Cross : Kaye Garner
- Caretakers Cottage — Paddington : Laurie Matthews
- Taldemunde – North Sydney: Paul Borger.

From the records of the first meeting 19-9-79<sup>11</sup> they agreed that:

*"YRAG would be a vehicle for lobbying (using simple statistics); info sharing; support and an arena for sharing ideas and new methods being implemented in the refuges."*

After a few meetings the group shifted from being about 'reflection' and 'support' towards 'action' and 'advocacy'. In David Annis Brown's words

*"We decided that things needed changing outside of our services, that just talking about it amongst ourselves wasn't going to do much and that we needed a base from which to work for change"*

Pretty much the base assumption for YAA for the next few decades, of working for young people.

Other youth homelessness peaks emerged around the country at this time . . . The Youth Accommodation Coalition of Victoria was also established in 1979 as a coalition of groups and individuals concerned about youth homelessness. Initially in 1981 there was an attempt to have a statewide Queensland Youth Accommodation Coalition (QYAC), this broad based Coalition eventually broke into two separate Coalitions — SEQYAC and NOYAC. It is worth noting here, that at a time when it was still illegal for men to have sex with each other credit should be given to the bureaucrats and Ministers here and in other States who went out on a limb at times to fund services. In NSW Twenty Ten opened in Darlinghurst in 1981.

### Early 1980s and before SAAP

YRAG merges with Combined Youth Refuges Association to become Youth Refuge Association (YRA) representing the interests of both workers and management of youth refuges.<sup>12</sup> Membership in 1980 was 25 services. YRA was first located in Burnside Homes in Bankstown Around this time Medium term services emerged to solve the problem of refuges having nowhere







Christa : Sydney Town Hall mid 1980's

to refer young people to. At the 1982 AGM, the extra 'A' was added onto YRA, to become the Youth Refuge Accommodation Association, to account for the growth of medium and long term services and move 'Beyond Refuges'.

There was much disagreement and difference in the sector. The YRA Philosophy Sub committee in 1979-80 reported:

*"It was identified by workers at the time that there were not consistent links between ideologies, principles and practices, which created difficulty and confusion." And concern over the 'geographical distribution of funds for Youth Refuges'.*

As a solution they recommended to set up an ideology subcommittee and a profile subcommittee. From a statement of philosophy from a service in Nth NSW:

*"as workers at . . . we are committed to understanding how young people are oppressed in our society and as a result of this understanding, taking action to ensure that all young people we come in contact with are treated as fully human, equal and much respected members of society . . . in reality young people intelligent, zesty, powerful cooperative vital to the world and loving toward each other . . . any appearance to the contrary are merely the effects of past mistreatment and unresolved pain . . . as a united force, lets break the chain of pain and uncover the reality!"*

In 1981, Catherine Mackenzie (as YRAA NSW and NYCH delegate) noted at the first National Youth Accommodation Workshop in Canberra youth accommodation workers came together from all over Australia to form some sort of national apparatus. NYCH emerged out of that workshop. This was linked to a national campaign using the slogan "Shelter or the Streets". NYCH received funding and began, it held its first inaugural meeting in September, 1982. First NYCH youth housing policy drafted in September 1982. National secretariat of NYCH was established in Fitzroy Melbourne March 1983.

As Narelle Clay noted in 1994 at the first National AFHO conference,

*"The youth homeless sector was well organised, even in pre SAAP days."*

In the decade ahead the work continued and things got a bit more radical. Perhaps 80's for YAA and youth accommodation services in NSW, could be characterised as a period of feisty activism, idealism, where anything was possible, with bold and statements, 'bush conferences', calls to action, marches, sleep outs and public campaigns, a sense of 'us and them'. But it was a struggle to get noticed, to be heard to be on the political and social agenda. Workers at the YAA 25 year event, recalled stunts like staging sit-outs outside politicians offices, lots of street theatre and of sitting behind politicians at question time in Parliament holding up big signs "LIAR" or "NOT TRUE". Some of the photos on this page are from the YAA "Shelter or the streets / Your Dream Our Nightmare" sleep outs at Sydney Town Hall in the 1980's.

The Shelter or the Streets campaigns began in the early 1980s. Yet, it was also a time of building and establishment and of working through differences and putting the issues of youth homelessness on the radar, which contributed to the establishment of SAAP in 1985 and the work of Brian Burdekin in the 1989, when for a brief few years, the issue of youth homelessness reached a zenith in terms of public awareness. ■

## Whatever happened to the revolution?

If you can remember the Skyhooks song — you might remember the answer!

### Footnotes

1. From "25 Years of YAA" October 2005
2. {Irving, 1995 #455}
3. {Irving, 1995 #455, pg 328}
4. Jaggs, 1986 {Jaggs, 1986 #521}
5. Though the notions of youth as a period of storm and stress still underpinned that thinking, ref G Stanley Hall (1904)
6. "One Step Forward" report on the Youth Services Scheme.
7. From the YAA Archives
8. Homes away from Home (1988) Coleen Chesterman
9. Everything you always wanted to know about youth housing (1988) NYCH
10. YAA 1989 "Historical Context of the Youth Housing Sector"
11. From the minutes of the meeting: attended by Annandale young Peoples Refuge, Bankstown Youth Refuge, Blacktown Youth Refuge, Fairfield Youth Refuge, Kings Cross Refuge, Caretakers Cottage (Laurie M), Taldemunde.
12. Vaughan Bowie — Chairman's report First AGM in August 1980

# History of Response to Homelessness

By Elena Rosenman,  
AFHO Policy Officer

Homelessness in Australia is not a new phenomenon — iterations, definitions and policy responses can be traced back to the arrival of Europeans. It could be argued that homelessness holds quite a specific and romantic place in the Australian cultural identity. Our unofficial anthem, *Waltzing Matilda*, tells the story of a jolly swagman, a man who travelled across Australia in search for work, and who, at the end of a long day, downed his bedding and set up camp by a billabong — grateful for the shade of a Coolibah tree. Banjo Patterson wrote the poem in 1895, however the appeal of his swagman remains current. In many ways the swagman can be seen as emblematic of Australian values — a man as worn and rugged as the Australian landscape, a down to earth labourer who would rather die than capitulate to traditional authority. The Australian legacy of the swagman echoes a broader tradition of gypsies, travellers and drifters. Their itinerant freedom is often read as a quixotic refusal to be trapped by material possession or social and familial expectations. The reality of homelessness — in the colonies as in the cities and towns of Australia today is far less poetic.

In 1788, the First Fleet landed in Botany Bay, dispossessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and marking the beginning of their history of homelessness in Australia. Over 200 years later, homelessness in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities cannot be understood without reference to the legacy of European colonisation and the ensuing dispossession and physical and cultural displacement. For those arriving in the colonies, the first years of white settlement saw almost everyone fed, clothed and housed from public rations. In his overview of Australian homelessness, Clem Lloyd suggests that the social control exerted by colonial authorities was assured until the 1830s and thus vagrancy in Australia was minimal.<sup>1</sup> As Australian society expanded through the 1800s boarding houses were set up in large cities to accommodate young men, single women, couples and families. These were seen as fashionable and reputable accommodation. The first charity in Australia, the Benevolent Society of New South Wales was established in 1813 and other societies, religious organisations and charities followed shortly after. As Lloyd details, to provide shelter to those who needed it, 'destitute asylums were funded and built by the colonial administrations, with private charities playing an important but supplementary role.'<sup>2</sup> Between 1829 and 1859, Western Australia, Victoria, South Australian and Queensland were founded. These states also established public asylums to accommodate people who were homeless. Portentously, lunacy asylums or

mental institutions were also widely used as accommodation for the homeless.<sup>3</sup>

Depression and economic downturn at the close of the nineteenth century rendered homelessness as a significant social issue. Families were evicted onto the street and people who were homeless became increasingly visible in public places in big Australian cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. By the century's close most of these cities had night refuges which provided shelter — though on an overcrowded and temporary basis. By 1908 the federal government had introduced pensions for the aged and invalid. There was yet no system of public housing which left people in poverty at the mercy of private landlords.<sup>4</sup> With little respite before the beginning of the first World War, major economic depression hit Australia in the post war period in the 1930s. Unemployment rose above 30 percent, the construction of new homes was halted and housing conditions continued to deteriorate. Tent cities sprang up in many larger cities and a significant minority of people found themselves living in huts and humpies.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1937 and 1942 the South Australian, Victorian and NSW Governments established Housing Commission and these were flooded with applicants even though Commission housing was only available to people with permanent employment. In 1943, the Commonwealth Housing Commission was established to examine the extent of Australia's housing problems, and to recommend how these might be best resolved. The Commonwealth Commission endorsed the view that all Australians have a right to decent housing, 'every citizen of the Commonwealth is entitled to a good standard house and this should not depend on his economic position or the policy of the particular state in which he (sic) resides.' The year after the Commission's establishment, the housing shortage in Australia was estimated at 300 000 homes. 1945 saw the first *Commonwealth State Housing Agreement*, the significance of which was two-fold. First, it recognised a clear division of labour within the Australian Federation with respect to the provision of public housing. The States would be responsible for service delivery, while the Commonwealth would provide the financial support necessary to make the program feasible through cheap loans. Secondly, it signified for the first time in Australia's history a willingness by the Commonwealth to support the provision of public housing as a viable tenure. The period after the Second World War saw economic upturn, employment and the government strenuously promoted home ownership. Prosperity was short-lived and recession hit Australia again in the early 1950s and the core group of visibly homeless people in Australia after WWII was single, older men.

This image of homelessness remained until the 1960s and 70s when poverty and homelessness were reinstated in the public consciousness. The rise of Women's Liberation brought the issue of women's and children's homelessness to the fore. The first women's refuge in the world, Chiswick Women's Aid, opened in London in 1971. Sydney soon followed and Elsie, the first women's refuge in Australia, was opened in 1974. 'This was the unlikely beginning of one of the most significant social movements of twentieth century Australia. Within ten years there were over forty women's refuges in the state of New South Wales and more than one hundred and sixty in Australia.'<sup>6</sup>

Through the 1970s there was an increasing recognition of homelessness as social problem that required coordinated national action. The *Homeless Person's Assistance Act (1973) Commonwealth* was operationalised as the Homeless Person's Assistance Program. This was the beginning of official recognition of homelessness as a social issue and beginning of coordinated government response. The *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act* was passed in 1985. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) brought together the eight homelessness programs funded by individual state and territory governments under one nationally coordinated program. SAAP I focused on crisis and emergency funding within three sub programs — general services, youth services and women's emergency services funds and funded 500 homeless assistance services. SAAP II took up in 1989. The program moved away from sub programs to broader target groups and shifts the emphasis from crisis support to providing assistance to people to move through services to independence.

Adequate housing was also the focus of international legal and political frameworks. In 1976, Australia ratified the *International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* binding itself to the progressive realisation of the human right to adequate housing for all people. 1987 was declared International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and the Australian government made a formal commitment to implement policies that would effectively meet the needs of homeless people.

The picture of homelessness in Australia broadened significantly when the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) published their report, *Our Homeless Children* in 1988. This report was followed in 1993 by the Human Rights Commissioner's (Burdekin) Report. This report brought the human rights issues of overt abuse within mental health institutions, and covert neglect in the wider



community, to the attention of the general public. The report sparked the deinstitutionalisation of mental health services in Australia. The promised shift of funding to community based services fell far short of need and more people with mental illness slipped onto the streets of Australian cities and into transient accommodation and homeless assistance services.

In 1994 the *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994)* was passed. The act included a definition of homelessness which had been missing from the 1989 act.

- 4 (1) *For the purposes of this Act, a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing.*
- (2) *For the purposes of this Act, a person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:*
- damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or*
  - threatens the person's safety; or*
  - marginalises the person through failing to provide access to*
  - adequate personal amenities;*
  - the economic and social supports that a home normally affords;*
  - places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.*

Through bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments SAAP III provided more than \$1 billion to 1 200 homeless assistance services in 1995. SAAP III introduced significant reforms and initiatives. The scope of the definition of homelessness in the new act allowed services to develop prevention and early intervention models for people in inadequate housing or at risk of homelessness. The National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) was also established as part of the reforms under SAAP III. While some funds were made available for improving services no growth funding was provided in the agreement.

When SAAP IV took over in 2000 it was shaped by four strategic themes agreed to by the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments. These were:

1. Client-focused service delivery,
2. Integration and collaboration between SAAP and other service systems,
3. Increasing performance, knowledge and skills,
4. Working together.

The current five year SAAP Agreement (SAAP V) took effect in 2005. The new features of SAAP V include the introduction of an *Innovation and Investment Fund* to drive important strategic reform within the

SAAP sector and an enhanced accountability, reporting and evaluation framework. SAAP V also includes the requirement that all state and territory governments increase their program funding contributions to SAAP to match the Australian Government's investment on a 50/50 basis from the third year of the Agreement. SAAP V also did not include any increase in funding beyond CPI.

During the 1990s the homelessness sector continued to take shape in circumstances that were often difficult. The Social and Community Services (SACS) Award was introduced in 1991. The first National Conference on Homelessness was held in 1996 in Melbourne. Six hundred people came together over three days to share their knowledge, experience and commitment to addressing homelessness. In 1998 the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO) was established as the national peak for homelessness organisations. The second National Homelessness Conference was held in Melbourne in 1999 and 800 people attend from across the country. The same year, the Australian government established the National Homelessness Strategy to provide leadership in developing approaches for the prevention and

reduction of homelessness. In 2000 Victoria became the first state to develop its own Homelessness Strategy. Western Australia followed in 2002, the ACT and Northern Territory in 2004 and Queensland in 2005.

The 2001 census showed that one in every 200 Australians was homeless. Of these 100 000 people, only 15 000 were accommodated in homeless assistance services. While the policy responses to homelessness have progressed and solidified over 200 years of European occupation, it seems that a truly national and integrated approach is an aspiration for the future. ■

#### Footnotes

1. Lloyd, C, " 'Poor Naked Wretches:' a historical overview of Australian homelessness," *A History of European Housing in Australia*, ed Patrick Troy, 289.
2. Lloyd, C, *op cit*, p 291.
3. Lloyd, C, *op cit*, p 292.
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# The NSW Women's Refuge Movement

By Catherine Gander,  
 Executive Officer  
 NSW Women's Refuge  
 Resource Centre

*...because violence against women has always been around and nobody wanted to know and women had to hide the bruises and lie to everyone and tell the doctor she fell down the stairs or walked into a door and he asked no questions and gave her some pills and the police ignored it and the courts took no action and the church turned a blind eye and the experts assumed that she must have provoked it. Because there was no place for her to go where he would not find her and she had no money and he had the house and the car and the power so the sons learned to hit and the daughters learned to take it and never hit back and she had no friends left and no one believed her and he threatened to kill her and maybe the kids if she ever left and at last some women got really bloody angry and vowed that this had to stop and began to make waves and got some safe houses and made the state pay for them and we go on demanding a fair go for women and children and it might take a hundred years but that won't stop us 'cause we want a world where women are strong and children are happy and we won't go away till we get it ... and for lots and lots of other reasons we are a part of the women's refuge movement.<sup>1</sup>*

## History of the WRM

The NSW Women's Refuge Movement (WRM) came out of, what is commonly referred to as the second wave of feminism in the seventies and the analysis that domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are directly related to a patriarchal system that accepts and promotes an unequal power relationship between women and men.

When the feminist movement started to address domestic violence in the 70's, there were no crisis services to support women and children escaping domestic violence.

In a 1975 survey of women who had experienced domestic violence found the major reason for staying, cited by 89% of the women interviewed, was that "they had nowhere to go".

As domestic violence was considered a private matter and there was a strong stigma attached to women who separated. It was almost impossible for women to find alternative accommodation. Women were not eligible for emergency housing as long as the matrimonial house existed. The

Department of Housing would not house women with children without a husband. This was changed thanks to the WRM campaigning to change the definition of "family", so as to include single mothers and lesbians.

Women escaping domestic violence with their children were also discriminated against by landlords and real estate agents, who would often refuse to lease to them. They faced great financial difficulties, had poor prospect of finding employment that would pay a decent wage. The limited income support they were entitled to in the form of child support benefit, required the husband having access to their address. While charities gave handouts, they often put pressure on the women to "reconcile" with their violent partners.

The issue of domestic violence, as well as sexual assault was brought into the open at feminist consciousness raising meetings. During the International Women's Day Celebrations in 1974, a forum was held on "Women in a violent society". This forum was the catalyst for the establishment of the first domestic violence refuge in Australia, and also of the Sydney Rape Crisis Centre.

The first refuge was established in April 1974 by a group of women who squatted 2 adjacent properties, and worked as volunteers. The two houses were called Elsie and Minnie (now Elsie Women and Children's Refuge). Within the first 6 weeks they had 48 women and 35 children. Unfortunately the issue of unmet demand has stayed with us ever since!

Other refuges followed Elsie. Initially refuges were run by volunteers and funded solely by community donations. Recognising domestic violence as a social and systemic problem, refuges sought to do more than provide a safe place for women and children. Advocacy, community education and social change were required.

As soon as a few refuges were established, they came together and supported each other in the various campaigns for funding, housing and better services for women and children escaping domestic violence. Refuges started sharing ideas, resources and practices.

Then in 1975, after extensive campaigning, the Whitlam government provided limited funding to 7 refuges in NSW, some of which were already operating. Receiving government funding was about more than receiving money, it was about gaining political recognition that domestic violence was not a "private" matter. The funding received, however was inadequate and uncertain.

In 1976/77, Commonwealth funding was cut back to 90% of operating costs and 75% of capital costs. The Wran NSW

State Government agreed to provide gap-funding to the refuges that were already federally funded and new funding to some centres that were not included in the Federal Health Program. Gradually other refuges gained funding, but it was not until January 1985, eleven years after the founding of the first women's refuge, that refuges received secure funding through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments.

## The Establishment of the WRM

The first state conference was held in Bathurst in February 1979, and since then NSW refuges have met regularly to exchange information and ideas, the establishment of regions followed. Then in 1983 NSW Women's Working Party was created to carry out work and make decisions in between state conferences. The NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre opened in 1986, to support and resource the Working Party and the WRM

The Movement also recognised that Indigenous women, lesbians and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds faced additional barriers. Therefore, specialist support groups and representative positions were established to address issues of access and equity for these groups.

Today the NSW Women's Refuge Movement represents 57 refuges across NSW. It has been pivotal in improving the response to women and children experiencing/escaping domestic violence. The Movement played a key role in the establishment of the DV line and the Court assistance Scheme, as well as advocating on issues such as funding for refuges, changes to relevant legislation in the areas of family law, domestic violence law, sexual assault, child sexual assault and housing. The movement was also crucial in raising awareness of the issues faced by children experiencing domestic violence and gaining the recognition for children as clients in their own right in SAAP services.

## Homelessness and DV

Much has changed for the better in the last 30 years. The community is more aware of the issues and more supportive. Domestic violence is not relegated to the private sphere anymore and a number of services and agencies support women and children experiencing or escaping violence. Legislation and policies have also changed to better protect women and children and improve access to income support, housing, legal services etc.

However, much remains to be done.

The link of domestic violence with women and children's homelessness is strong and persistent. Domestic violence has remained



the single most prevalent reason for women and children accessing homeless assistance services since the beginning of data collection in 1996.<sup>2</sup>

Thousand of women and children are still made homeless each year because of domestic violence, many cannot be accommodated in refuges and many more do not access services.

In 2004-05 in Australia 13,970 women clients and 19,910 accompanying children were accommodated at least once by DV services.<sup>3</sup> A similar number could not be accommodated because refuges were full. In 2003-04, around one in two women<sup>4</sup> and around two in three accompanying children<sup>5</sup> were turned away from services for women and children escaping domestic violence.

Unlike people homeless for other reasons, women and children escaping domestic violence have a home but it is not safe for them to remain or return to.

When women leave the violence, they often lose their home, support networks and community. Even after the crisis is over, women and children may find themselves in an unsafe or unstable housing situation, with many having to move more than once to escape from the perpetrator of violence, or simply due to financial issues and the difficulty of accessing and maintaining

affordable housing. They may have to relocate away from their area and lose the support of their family and friends. Women may find that they are further from their place of employment and children may have to change schools. Often leaving their toys, clothes and other personal possession behind.

This instability and sometimes long term homelessness brought about by domestic violence prevents women and children from healing and rebuilding their lives. This is stark contrast to the perpetrator who often remains in the family home and faces few consequences.

Historically, it has always been women and children who were expected to leave the family home for their safety. In more recent years, the option to enable women and children to stay safely in the home has been explored, with pilot projects being run in the ACT, Tasmania and New South Wales. The Crisis Payment, provided by Centrelink, has also been extended to women experiencing domestic violence, who choose to remain in their home (effective from January 2007). The WRM is supportive of these new developments; indeed the Movement played a significant role in the extension of the Crisis Payment.

While philosophically agreeing with the move towards increasing options for women and

children experiencing violence and assisting them in remaining safely in the home through an integrated response model, there are concerns that this may be seen as a cheaper model and promoted as the standard to aim for in all cases, rather than a choice for a particular group of women. For some women, remaining in the home may never be a safe option, or an outcome they wish to pursue.

A comprehensive domestic violence strategy that ensures the safety and stability of women and children escaping domestic violence is long overdue. Such a strategy must provide an integrated response that will assist women to remain or return safely to their home or access safe and affordable housing to make a new home. ■

#### Footnotes

1. The New South Wales Women's Refuge Movement Orientation Manual April 2006 update
2. Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, SAAP National Data Collection Agency (NDCA), 2006
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# Talking like a Toora Woman: the herstory of a single women's service

Elena Rosenman

On the 8th of August 1983, Toora Single Women's Shelter opened its doors. It was the first single women's refuge in Canberra and joined a very small clutch of such services across Australia. While single women's services developed a complex understanding of women's homelessness and the related issues of mental illness and chemical dependency, they came up against some resistance, both within the women's refuge movement and within the bureaucratic structures that administered their funding. The needs of single women had only ever been conceptualised as a problem for women's refuges. Addressing the issue of domestic violence often seem to come at the expense of a broader examination of women's homelessness.

Consciousness raising was one of the defining features of second wave feminism in the 1970s. Across Australia women formed groups where they interrogated their own lives and relationships with men — fathers, lovers, brothers and friends. These groups exposed the extent of violence in women's lives, highlighted how many women had lived through sexual assault in their childhood homes and went on to manage home lives dictated by domestic violence, exploitation and tyranny. Consciousness raising gave birth to one of the most enduring tenets of the feminist movement, 'the personal is political.' 'The personal is political' forever altered the meaning of the word political and expanded the feminist analysis of the patriarchy, power and women's oppression. Aired in consciousness raising groups experiences woman had been deeply ashamed of, or saw as personal shortcomings — rape, incest, and domestic violence — started to take on a much less personal aspect. What women had suffered in isolation began to take on an unmistakable pattern. The personal lives of women told the women's movement as much about the patriarchy as did the formal inequalities. Sexism was more than formal inequality; it was ingrained in cultural and social ideas about women and femininity. It was manifest in every interaction and relationship between men and women. It pervaded workplaces, social institutions and snaked its way through the personal lives of women. As women shared their experiences of families, sex and violence the movement developed an analysis of women's sexuality and a trenchant critique of women's traditional role in the family, 'identifying the isolated nuclear family household as the central institution of patriarchy and a primary site of women's oppression.'

The flip side of 'the personal is political' brought with it a responsibility for women to challenge the patriarchy in their own lives. As Australian feminist historian Marilyn Lake elucidated, if women were going to change their lives, they needed somewhere to go to do it.

*Change began with oneself. Hundreds of women took the advice and walked out of marriages, changed their names, formed new households and began their lives anew . . . To ease the passage of women wanting to leave their marital home but with nowhere to go, 'halfway houses' or 'women's shelters' were set up by women who sometimes volunteered their own houses for the cause.<sup>2</sup>*

In 1974, Elsie — the first women's refuge in Australia was established in Sydney. The same year Canberra women's liberation began to work towards a similar service and the Canberra Women's Refuge (CWR) opened in March 1975. It was only a matter of months before the small house was overflowing. Gill Shaw, a young woman working at the refuge recalled, 'our policy at that time was that we didn't refuse anybody entry . . . so the place was absolutely packed to the rafters.' Another worker, Pat Walker, remembered nights where up to fifty women and children were bunked over the house, in beds, on couches and on the floor. In addition to women and children fleeing violent homes, the refuge attracted women without children. They included young women escaping incest and alcohol and drug affected homes, many who were often using alcohol and drugs themselves, and older women often with pronounced mental illness, chemical dependency or both. Housing single women together with women and children became increasingly problematic and the CWR collective eventually decided it would no longer accommodate single women. As Liz O'Brien, a member at the time recalled, 'it couldn't be done. The demand was just so overwhelming that there had to be priority for women with children . . . we just couldn't house everybody.' The decision to exclude single women at the CWR was preceded by the same decision at Elsie and other women's refuges across Australia.

The Toora Single Women's Shelter collective was formed in 1981. The three founding members — Pat Walker, Gill Shaw and Di Lucas had all been involved with the CWR and were driven by the realisation that the needs of many single women were complex, desperate and unmet. Toora Single Women's Shelter opened in 1983 after two years of intensive effort. While the Toora Collective knew the CWR had trouble accommodating

single women, nothing could have prepared them for what happened when the Shelter opened. Of the women who used the service in the first months of operation, half were living with mental illness, a similar number had attempted suicide. More than half were struggling with drug and alcohol dependency and many were dealing with multiple issues such as alcohol and depression. Toora's commitment to the women excluded by other women's refuges lead to an important political analysis of women's chemical dependency and women's experiences in the mental health system. For Jacqui Pearce, an early collective member, it was one of the defining elements of the service.

*Single women who were 'skid row homeless women' were at the bottom of the pile in terms of being someone who anyone might care about, they didn't rate a mention, barely rated any services. And single women are a tricky bunch because of the level of drug use and mental health and all the rest of it. So we really started analysing our stats and seeing this many women have experienced sexual abuse in their life, there must be some links here.*

Toora's opening in the mid-1980s coincided with the national move to deinstitutionalise mental health services. Revelations of serious systemic abuse and neglect in large institutions and recognition of the dubious therapeutic benefit provided by these institutions drove a move to shut them down. While there was widespread community support for deinstitutionalisation, the promise of an accompanying shift of funding to community based services fell far short of need. The inevitable result was large numbers of people with serious mental health issues were released from mental health institutions with inadequate or non-existent avenues of support. While large institutions were undoubtedly of limited value when it came to care or treatment, they at least provided food and shelter to people who were often long estranged from friends or family support. The closure of Kenmore in Goulburn and the Watson Hostel in Canberra had a serious impact on homelessness services in the ACT. Refuges were left to deal with the fall out of failed deinstitutionalisation policies, as women that had been confined to institutions were suddenly on the streets with no support. None were accompanied by children so the domestic violence refuges were not an option for them. For the most part, they ended up at Toora and the collective witnessed firsthand the damage inflicted by long-term institutionalisation. Bridie Doyle, an early Toora worker, described the women who came to Toora from institutions as having 'a



*learned hopelessness and helplessness. They had no taught capacity to initiate change, to stand up for their rights and they had no understating of their 'madness' as a natural response to trauma.'*

The Toora Collective observed that an enormous percentage of the women in the mental health system were survivors of severe sexual assault, neglect and other abuse. The collective began to link past traumas to the symptoms of mental illness women were now experiencing. Originally, the diagnosis of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) had been limited to male war veterans, but the 1980s brought the realisation that women who had survived domestic violence or sexual assault were suffering identical symptoms. The Toora collective believed behaviour previously seen as madness should be reclassified as a reasonable and predictable response to trauma. The construction of women as mentally ill served to direct attention to the behaviour of women and so obscured and invalidated the original trauma. The Toora collective realised the force of patriarchy went far beyond immediate physical and emotional violence; the silencing of women was systemic.

The decade after Elsie's opening had seen the rapid expansion of the women's refuge movement, as more than 150 women's refuges opened throughout Australia. Over time, awareness of domestic violence had spread and the existence of women's refuges had become more accepted by governments and the wider community. The advent of a permanent funding program in the early 1980s gave women's refuges the most financial certainty they had yet experienced and they became an integral part of Australia's social services system. Though feminists had to fight to get domestic violence on the national agenda, community attitudes did shift significantly in the decades following the establishment of the original women's refuges. Services for single women enjoyed less support than domestic violence services within the women's refuge movement itself. Indeed, the needs of single women had only ever been conceptualised as a problem for women's refuges. Their understanding of women's homelessness was limited to women immediately escaping domestic violence. Julia Ryan was involved with the establishment of the CWR and admitted more long-term homelessness was not something the collective had considered. The refuge *'was very family oriented. We honestly thought the problem was domestic violence, wives and children. Homeless single women were not in our universe.'* In 1982, the National Women's Refuge Conference report identified the 'problem' of single women in women's refuges as a distraction from the task of addressing domestic violence. Single women were, *'creating particular problems for the refuges which were initially established primarily to assist women and their children who were the victims of domestic violence.'*

Services for single women started to feel that the focus on domestic violence within the women's refuge movement failed to consider the political analysis they had formed of

homelessness. There was a feeling that single women's needs had been, and continued to be, ignored by the original refuges, perhaps because they were too complicated and demanded too much time and attention. In addition, the support single women's services offered did not seem to be adequately appreciated within the refuge movement. Lyn Morgain, an early Toora collective member, recalled that as a single women's service, voicing issues beyond domestic violence within the broader women's refuge movement required continued effort:

*The whole single women versus the domestic violence women's sector was huge before Toora was in the women's refuge movement. For the whole 1980s through mid 90s that was the defining issue ... We were on about addiction we were also very staunch advocates around the rights and needs of women without children or without children in their care. It was a huge point of political difference, because the refuge movement nationally as a whole was very much focused on domestic violence and we always saw ourselves as the counter voice. We had years, and years, and years of going to women's refuge conferences and being the radical element that was putting the different view.*

The exclusion of single women, particularly those with stories of chemical dependency, mental illness and institutionalisation in the women's sector meant the connection between the lives of these women and the vulnerability of women and children immediately escaping domestic violence was lost. In her history of domestic violence refuges, Ludo McFerran commented,

*The fact that the longer term homeless women had probably themselves once been victims of family or domestic violence, that this had resulted in their homelessness, and that they may have had their own children at one time was obscured. Those women for whom being homeless was a new experience perceived the others as different. Perhaps they saw in them their own future, and did not like the vision. Perhaps it was simply they*

*wanted to protect their vulnerable children from the damaged behaviour of some of these women. This tension reoccurs throughout the history of refuges, and has led to a separation of the issues domestic violence and homelessness which is problematic.'*<sup>3</sup>

The issues homeless single women brought with them — chemical dependency, self-harm and PTSD, posed a challenge for the women's movement and were less palatable to the wider community. As Annie Kenney, a refuge for young single women in Tasmania, observed, the stigma experienced by women who used the refuge, *'stems from the belief that homelessness and unemployment are the fault of the individual, rather than that of the political, social and economic policies of the time.'*<sup>4</sup> The drug and alcohol dependency and 'madness' experienced by women at Toora were also outside the common conception of domestic violence. On the surface, such things lacked the clear dynamic of perpetrator and victim inherent in domestic violence and could be seen as things that women actively chose or fell victim to because of personal weakness. The more the Toora collective examined the issues that affected women's homelessness, the more it seemed they were addressing elements of patriarchy more complex than the traditional feminist narrative of domestic violence. The collective would testify that no woman chose homelessness in the true sense of choice. For the women who managed chemical dependency and mental illness the route back to patriarchal violence or trauma was there, it was just more convoluted and not as immediately visible. Single women's services began to clear that path.

*This is an edited extract of Talking like a Toora Woman: the herstory of Toora Women Inc. published 2004. To order a copy please contact Toora Women Inc. 02 6122 7000 or admin@toora.org.au*

#### Footnotes

- 1 Pringle, R, "Family, kith and kin," *Oxford Australian Feminism: A Companion*, p. 98.
- 2 Lake, M, *Getting Equal*, p. 229.
- 3 McFerran, L, *A History of Domestic Violence, Refuges and Exclusion in Australia*.
- 4 Robinson, K, *Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge, Tasmania, Youth Services Documentation Project*, p. 2.



# Opinion

Heather Holst\*

I have been thinking about how homelessness policy and studying history relate to each other. This is a big question for me as I work in both areas and want to understand more clearly the ways that each can inform the other. I certainly feel that better homelessness policy is made when the history is considered.

The English historian John Tosh recently gave a public lecture in Melbourne in which he put forward his idea that historical perspectives need to be more widely used in social policy development because an understanding of the historical aspects of an issue can open up present day options. Among many other activities, Tosh contributes to a British website called History and Policy ([www.historyandpolicy.org](http://www.historyandpolicy.org)), which specifically aims to offer historical perspectives that will assist present day policy making. The articles in this Parity certainly confirm this belief in the utility of history and offer helpful insights for the making of homelessness policy.

As Nell Musgrove's article shows us, a complex pattern of events can be better seen with the benefit of a historical view. Once the discriminatory thinking of the Camp Pell social workers and the general public of that period becomes clear in this way, the reader may well ask themselves what they are doing now in their own practice that might be seen this way now or in future. It is hard to see patterns when you are standing in the picture, but this is one way to catch a glimpse.

Even when you are not a central player, it can be very hard to understand what is happening without the historical background. Bill Day's article about the Darwin town camps is a compelling example

of how a historical perspective can help to understand a seemingly intractable current issue. The personal accounts of several contributors also argue for the benefits of living through a bit of history and how this has deepened their understanding of homelessness.

Tracing an issue back historically can reveal a lot about the underlying concepts we unwittingly use. Several articles in this edition do this tracing and argue that other concepts are actually more helpful in understanding what is happening and what can be done. What if homelessness is conceived in terms of the person's legal rights rather than in terms of welfare? What if long-grass people are understood as traditional land owners rather than as drifters and substance abusers? Why has housing in South Australia come to be understood as a welfare issue rather than an economic issue? These alternative concepts open up new policy options, several of them already proving much more effective than the former understandings. Notice also how many of these articles show the tremendous negative power — the sweeping of certain people to the margins — that occurs when the concept of personal deficiency forms the basis for understanding an issue.

An added dimension to using historical analysis is that of movement, of the direction that the trajectory of events is taking and from which you might discern an intervention that may alter a course of events. At least understanding the history may provide an



insight into patterns best avoided. Unfortunately, the most frequent use of history in public policy is an after-the-event analysis of its failures, even its disasters. This certainly can be helpful and necessary but it can be a bit of a 'cheap shot' taken from the safe distance of non-involvement.

As Shurlee Swain, the Australian historian who has written widely about child welfare observes, there is a tendency for each new generation of social workers and policy makers to feel they will revolutionise practice to prevent power imbalances, coercion, understanding the 'client' as deviant from middle class values and all the other multitude of sins of which social work can stand accused. It is advisable to know this pattern and to realise that we are probably not exceptions.

We see academics from several social sciences around the advisory table now, but it is still rare to see a historian deliberately invited or historical aspects explicitly considered when making decisions.

\* Heather has worked for many years in the homelessness sector and is now completing a PhD in History at the University of Melbourne.

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