



CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

HOPE

Homelessness

Action Strategy | 2008-2013

Remember the
rest of us get
calls too!

Homelessness is not
what it was – anyone can
fall through the system.

SACRED HEART
MISSION

OP
SHOP



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CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

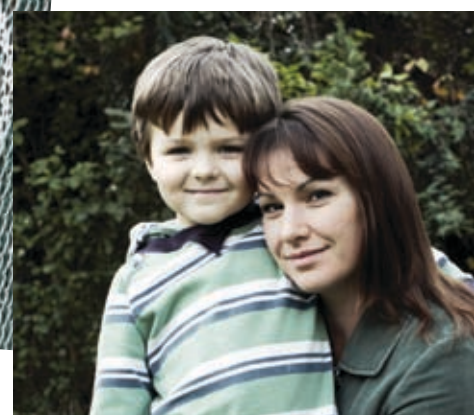
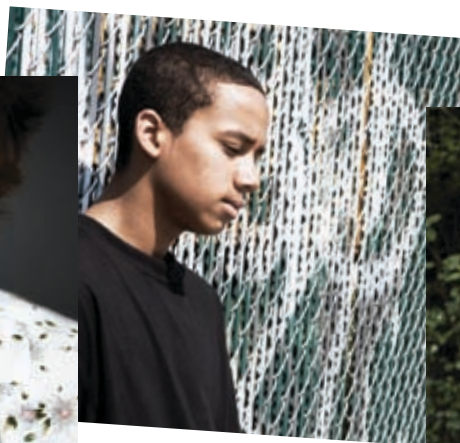
PART ONE

What did people who have experienced homelessness tell us?

Developing the Port Phillip Homelessness Strategy has included consulting with people who have experienced homelessness or were currently homeless.

Many expressed their extensive knowledge as well as their shared frustration and fears that were common experiences:

- People experiencing homelessness come from all walks of life;
- Everyone has a right to be treated the same in accessing a service;
- We need more housing as it is getting more difficult to find somewhere to live;
- Adequacy of housing needs to be emphasised, adequacy is not just the physical structure but the choices you have as to who you are living with, the security of the tenure and the real level of affordability with many commenting that rooming houses could charge around 70% of a low income and still be referred to as low cost accommodation;
- There is a need for increased accountability and transparency across all the sectors of service provision – housing, homelessness services, Centrelink and health services. Planning of these services needs greater input by people who have experienced homelessness;
- People with a mental illness are one of the most vulnerable groups in the community. They have the least planning for and provision of their accommodation needs;
- Fear and uncertainty is a big constant for someone facing homelessness; being in-limbo waiting to locate a secure home, perhaps leaving an abusive family situation to face further violence and abuse, and generally feeling as if you have moved into a parallel world where you become invisible to the mainstream community – many felt family breakdown and domestic violence had been a major cause of their homelessness;
- Peer education programs work, and that expanded outreach support programs are urgently needed, especially to rooming houses.



“A home is more than a physical structure. The attributes of home can be seen to be security of tenure, security against threats, physical characteristics which do not undermine health or create further disadvantage, affordability, living with people of one’s choice, privacy and autonomy and control.”¹

Why a Homelessness Strategy?

The City of Port Phillip has a proud and well established history of embracing diversity and harmoniously accommodating people from different backgrounds. This has been possible in the past because people have been able to secure, safe, accessible and affordable housing in Port Phillip. But over the past decade, gentrification and redevelopment has meant that it is more costly to live in this area and many parts of Melbourne.

The availability of safe, affordable and adequate housing is at a critical low and anyone with a low income, mental illness or disability struggles to remain housed in Port Phillip.

In our consultation with people who have experienced homelessness they report discrimination and exclusion from the community and from access to services, including housing support. Many have expressed on the one hand, that unless they are totally homeless they feel they will not be offered any form of housing. On the other hand, families fear becoming absolutely homeless will lead to separation from their children. People with health or age-related fragility currently may have few suitable, affordable, housing options that accommodate their particular needs. The prevalence and risk of homelessness in our community, and in the communities that surround our city, is growing and Council has a role to play.

This is a critical time for Council to be developing a Homelessness Action Strategy:

- Locally we are facing an increasing population, changing demographics and increasing house prices. These factors, together with scarce and expensive rental properties are forcing Port Phillip individuals, couples, and families receiving low incomes, out of our area into unaffordable, frequently substandard private dwellings or homelessness;

- There is continuing unmet demand for crisis accommodation. This is evident in the high daily turn away from existing services;
- There has been a dramatic loss of local affordable private rental stock including private rooming houses;
- There is an under supply of transitional (short to medium term) housing and not enough permanent housing to move on to. This blocks availability for people who are newly homeless;
- There is a lengthy wait, for some indefinite, for social housing (including public and community housing).

The City of Port Phillip Homelessness Action Strategy clarifies how Council aims to enhance community understanding of homelessness, prevent the incidence of homelessness, facilitate the integration and provision of housing and support services and coordinate responses to the needs of those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

At Parliament House in Canberra, on 27 January, 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said there were more than 100,000 homeless people in Australia and it was clear the Federal Government needed to do more to stop the growing trend.

“It’s something which you can either push to one side and sweep under the carpet or you can say, ‘Actually this is just dead wrong, we need to do something about it,’” Mr. Rudd said.

“We don’t believe it is something which a country as wealthy as ours in the 21st century can just ignore.”

– Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, January 21st 2008

¹ Neil, Cecily and Fopp, Rodney, (1994), Homelessness in Australia: Causes and Consequences, 2nd edn, AHURI, Melbourne, pp.iii-vii, 1-233

What is homelessness?

The social model of health is based on the premise that people's social and economic circumstances strongly affect their health throughout their life. Council recognises that homelessness and being in prolonged housing stress at imminent risk of homelessness is a critical health and well being issue.

- People sleeping rough or in temporary shelters are commonly referred to as experiencing primary homelessness .
- People staying in crisis accommodation or 'couch surfing', staying with friends or families are referred to as experiencing secondary homelessness.²
- People living in rooming houses, private hotels and transitional accommodation are classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as tertiary level homelessness, due to having insecure tenure, shared kitchens and bathrooms.
- Council acknowledges that not all people living in these forms of accommodation regard themselves as homeless and for some their rooming house is their choice of home.
- People experiencing homelessness report experiences in common. They are frequently at risk of suffering further harm from a range of factors related to lack of a secure and safe environment; impact on- diet, general health, mental health; increased exposure to substance abuse and violence.

"We have lived in St Kilda for over 20 years, I am 75 and my husband is 77, he relies on oxygen throughout the day, but especially at night. I have had five operations on my back. We are both on a lot of medication and have many outpatient visits to specialists at The Alfred. We have rented this home for 15 years, and now we have to leave because it is being sold, but we cannot find anything to rent, even within a ring of 10 kilometres from this area and everything we have tried has then had an extra \$50 added to the weekly advertised rent by the time we have inspected or applied for it – we are about to be thrown out on the street."

– George and Mary³

HOUSING IS AN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHT

Homelessness, inadequate housing and forced evictions represent violations of international human rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), recognises the right to adequate housing which is regarded as more than the idea of just shelter. "Adequate shelter means ... adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities – all at a reasonable cost". Adequate housing enables other basic rights to be enacted, including the right to education and work, to vote, to participate in the community and optimise physical and mental well being, and incorporates: legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy.

² Chamberlain, C. and MacKenzie, D. (1992) 'Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning', Australian Journal of Social Issues, 27(4), 274-297)

³ Names have been changed

Different definitions and views of homelessness

The City of Port Phillip endorses a broad definition of homelessness, which is informed by a range of understandings from policy, legislation, consultation and research. These recognise homelessness as an experience or situation of being unable to access safe, secure, affordable and suitable accommodation.

Council has consciously focussed upon homelessness as a term used to describe the experience in this strategy and refer to people having experienced/ experiencing homelessness rather than to homeless people. We seek to avoid stereotyping – homelessness is a broad and varied experience rather than one that is only related to one group. It can happen at any age and stage in someone's life with devastating impact.

Council recognises that many people are without a home and are excluded from obtaining affordable and suitable housing. This exclusion impacts not only on the individual and families experiencing homelessness but right across the broader community. People experiencing homelessness often endure social isolation and exclusion from the mainstream, discrimination, unemployment, often have little or no family support or support networks, and financial hardship.

Some people may need support to obtain suitable housing locally so they can continue their connections in the community, while others need ongoing assistance to help them to stay housed and become re-connected to their neighbourhood.

Homelessness occurs “when a person is left without a conventional home and lacks the economic and social supports that a home normally affords. He/she is often cut off from the support of relatives and friends, and has few independent resources. Often the person has no immediate means and in some cases, little prospect of independence”⁴

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Burdekin Enquiry into Homeless Children in 1989 defined homelessness as “a lifestyle which includes

insecurity and transience of shelter. It is not confined to a total lack of shelter. For many children and young people it signifies a state of detachment from family and vulnerability to dangers, including exploitation and abuse broadly defined, from which the family normally protects a child. However the Inquiry also found that there is a growing number of children who are 'homeless' because the whole family cannot obtain adequate shelter”.⁵

“I had given myself another six months of managing in this place, either I would have to move or end it. Now for the first time in ten years I can actually wash my own hair, whenever I feel like it, for the first time in ten years I am me again...”

– **Barbara, 62 years**, long term resident with a disability, recently moved to fully accessible local social housing⁶

The Federal Supported Accommodation Assistance Act (1994) outlines that a person is homeless if he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access:

- (a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or
- (b) threatens the person's safety; or
- (c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
 - (i) adequate personal amenities; or
 - (ii) the economic and social support that a home normally affords; or
- (d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.⁷

4 Office of Housing, (2007) Understanding Homelessness, Department of Human Services.

5 Burdekin, B (1989) Our Homeless Children : Report of the National Enquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra.

6 Names changed.

7 Chamberlain, C . Counting the Homeless, Implications for Policy Development 1996. ABS Occasional paper (1999)

Different definitions and views of homelessness – continued

“The idea is that some people become entrenched in the homeless population, while others only have a short experience of homelessness: the central premise is that the longer people are homeless the more likely they are to adapt to, and identify with, a homeless way of life.”⁸

City of Port Phillip believes that a safe and secure home is essential to facilitating sustainable social connections and building a fully inclusive community.

Council recognises that

- Housing is a basic human right
- Anyone can experience homelessness
- We need a range of support services and housing to prevent someone becoming homeless
- We need to work together to help people move out of homelessness, sustain housing outcomes and increase neighbourhood connectiveness

“I frequently have an ongoing relationship with vulnerable families in crisis and in emergency housing with a new baby or young child, then follow them up when they go into stable housing. They are often young women with many issues but have great hopes and dreams, they have often come from extremely disadvantaged childhoods themselves. In their endeavours to set up their ideal home and be a better parent than they experienced, they often run into crisis. They need intensive support and mentoring – too often, they or the system fails, and they end up being evicted and/or their children removed. Stable, supportive housing first, alongside community supports and time is needed to build trust when they may never have had anyone to trust – as the saying goes it takes a whole village to raise a child.”

– Comments from City of Port Phillip Enhanced Maternal & Child Health Service.

⁸ Chamberlain, C., Johnson, G, and Theobald, J., Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenge, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University, 2007

What are the factors leading to homelessness?

Lack of affordable housing is one of the most significant structural causes of homelessness. The growing difficulties experienced in accessing affordable housing are placing mounting pressure on communities across Melbourne and its outer regions, as well as other cities, rural and regional areas across Australia.

Many of the people we have spoken to have experienced homelessness over a number of years. They believe that one of the factors has been the changing face of employment over the past decade. Some have been unskilled or minimally skilled and with jobs in manufacturing and labouring having steadily reduced, it has been increasingly difficult to earn enough income to secure accommodation.

Older people particularly have related to us their experiences when faced with a range of service industries moving offshore thus reducing their job security. Restructuring to casual hours within the workforce combined with increasing private rental costs has been a devastating formula, leading to a number of people having to turn to friends' couches or their cars for shelter.

Others have expressed the difficulties they have faced trying to deal with a mental illness and obtaining an adequate and suitable home. Many have been living in

rooming houses, not from choice, and believe that this has compromised their recovery and added to the discrimination they experience.

The 'pathways'⁹ into homelessness are varied and can be experienced by anyone: losing your job, getting sick, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, a house fire, financial strain and emotional crisis can all lead to homelessness. Some of these health and social crises are made worse by the added difficulties faced by many low income households in accessing rental accommodation or maintaining a mortgage. People frequently experience recurring homelessness, as they have limited housing to enter from crisis or transitional accommodation.

Australian governments at all levels have attempted to respond to homelessness in different ways for a number of years, not always from within an integrated framework. It is acknowledged that the factors contributing to homelessness are diverse, complex and often interdependent. The involvement of all three levels of government and targets at reducing homelessness should be underpinning policies.¹⁰

THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO HOMELESSNESS ARE COMPLEX:

- Structural – such as unemployment, poverty, inadequate income support, and lack of affordable housing,
- Government fiscal and social policy – such as welfare expenditure health services and housing assistance;
- Personal – such as mental illness, family breakdown, domestic violence, alcohol and drug use, gambling, conflict with friends and family and sexual abuse.

9 MacKenzie, D and Chamberlain, C, 2003, Homeless careers: pathways in and out of homelessness, Counting the Homeless 2001 project, Swinburne and RMIT Universities & Johnson, G; Gronda, H & Coutts, S On the Outside Australian Scholarly Publishing Melb 2008

10 Limbrick, D. (2006) Exploring the needs of Homeless People: Accommodation and/ or Support, FACsIA, ACT, Australia.

What are the factors leading to homelessness? – continued

Housing stress is a term relating to those residents receiving incomes in the lowest 40% of the population, and paying over 30% of their income on housing costs. Many Port Phillip residents in this group have been paying well in excess of this proportion, over the past few years in particular. They have increasingly become homeless due to indefinite social housing waiting lists. Currently the wait for urgent public housing in the local Inner South Metropolitan region (Port Phillip and Stonington) varies from between 12 months to several years depending on type of property required and household size.

In 2005-2006, within the broader Southern Metropolitan Region, which includes Port Phillip, over 31,000 people presented for urgent housing assistance – nearly 40% were women, many accompanied by children.¹¹ Children who experience homelessness have a higher risk of experiencing homelessness in later adulthood.

A common public perception of who is experiencing homelessness has been that of older men with alcohol problems, yet the fastest growing sub-groups in Australia, the UK, Canada and the US are those of women with dependent children and youth.¹²

38% of people using homeless services in Australia are aged 15-24 years¹³. They have few housing options. Private landlords are loath to offer leases to young people, under 18 years of age, and they are unable to access public housing. Young people under 15 years of age are unable to access crisis housing. Young homeless men are at more risk of physical abuse than their peers.¹⁴

Currently some of Port Phillip's crisis services (Hanover, Home Ground, Salvation Army and Sacred Heart Mission), and the State Government Department of Human Services are working towards the implementation of an 'Opening Doors' model of streamlining and centralising access to crisis accommodation, as has been previously trialled in other regions with their 'Front Door' programs. To date these have worked on a scoring system, allotting greater priority to a person with more complex needs such as drug and alcohol issues. During our consultations some of the people who have experienced homelessness, and service providers, have expressed to us the view that this may make it more difficult for others without substance abuse issues to access crisis accommodation.



¹¹ SAAP 2007

¹² National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Program (SAAP V) Canberra 2007

¹³ ibid

¹⁴ Living Rough – preventing crime and victimisation among homeless young people National Crime Prevention report, Attorney General's Department, Canberra 1999

Other feedback from consultations

Consultations with service providers including Council staff during the evaluation of Council's Homelessness Protocol and scoping workshops for this strategy and review of Council's Housing Strategy identified critical issues as:

- Lack of affordable and emergency housing options;
- Lack of material aid and financial assistance;
- Lack of support services (during and after hours);
- Lack of intervention programs;
- Need to explore ways of making rooming houses safer;
- Federal and State policies that need reviewing and integrating;
- Need to advocate for greater focus on prevention/early intervention;
- Need to improve models for people who are homeless;
- Lack of flexible and integrated services;
- Unmet need for specialised complex needs services;
- Individual client frustration at the very poor quality of available housing;
- Impact of homelessness on a person's mental state;
- More support for existing services particularly family support; and
- Having to continually fight for funding
- Time limited services: lack of long term and continuous support
- Need to ensure strong connection between housing and homelessness strategies

Port Phillip residents involved with an evaluation of the Homelessness Protocol in 2006 valued processes and communication between Council and themselves that worked in an integrated manner.

They commented:

'They advised me what they were going to do... They actually rang me back after they had contacted the person involved'.

The 2006 Inner South Rooming House Project, interviewed service users who identified the following gaps:

- Lack of stable, appropriate, safe and affordable housing both emergency and long term, particularly for families and people with complex needs;
- Lack of flexibility in service provision and complexity of the service system;
- Poverty;
- Discrimination;
- Increase in multiple diagnoses and complexity of needs;
- De-institutionalisation and the lack of affordable supported housing options for people with a mental illness;
- Lack of sufficient funding to provide people with the service they need eg. People using up their quota of food vouchers.
- Lack of funding to provide support staff in rooming houses for those who need it.

(Gordon, R. (2006) Resolve Community Consulting)

'Kept us informed through the whole process. We saw the intervention by the police so we knew something was happening. It was an issue and it took sometime to resolve it'.

'We discussed these issues over the phone, but I think more of a personal approach would have been good. If they had come and explained the situation to us, we would have understood more about how it was being handled. But because we couldn't see anything happening we were unsure about what was being done'.

How big is the homelessness challenge in Port Phillip?

In developing this strategy, we have realised how our present understanding of the size of homelessness in Port Phillip is limited and dispersed across different data sets. We need to address this as a priority.

Our investigation so far shows us that a lot of homelessness can be hidden –

- **Older people**

Over a 12 month period (April 2007-08) more than 150 older long term Port Phillip residents presented to Council's Housing Information and Support service – 60% were facing extreme financial stress due to escalating rents and half were being evicted (within 60 days) due to a sale of the property.

- Over that period, this Housing Information and Support service assisted 52 older residents from the private rental market into local public housing – many had been waiting more than five years for local public or community housing.
- As at June 2008, there are over 100 people on the waiting list for a self-contained room at the community managed Rooming House Plus, Queens Road Melbourne.
- In 2007, 90% of adults seeking crisis accommodation each day were turned away from crisis accommodation services.¹⁵
- In July 2006, Port Phillip had 67 rooming houses with 1,209 beds, comprising 23 private rooming houses (417 rooms) and 44 public/community rooming houses (792 rooms).
- A majority of these rooming houses (36) are located in St Kilda, with 12 located in South Melbourne, three located in Port Melbourne, one in Melbourne and three in Elwood.
- At February 2008 there were 60 transitional housing properties in the St Kilda/St Kilda East area some possibly shared so a maximum of 108 rooms.

- In 2007-2008, over 4,000 people presented to Homeground Housing Services in St. Kilda, one of the central homelessness support organisations in the inner south region (Port Phillip and Stonnington).¹⁶
- **Children and their families**
Over one quarter of clients accessing homelessness assistance services in Victoria were single women with children;¹⁷
- **Youth**
Nearly half of the recorded homeless population in both Victoria and Australia were under the age of 24;¹⁸

“It is who you live with that is the most important thing that makes it a home and a good place to live”

– Rooming House Focus Group Participant²⁰

In the Inner Melbourne Counting District (includes Melbourne CBD, Yarra, Port Phillip and part of Stonnington) on Census Night 2006 Census total of 3440 people were deemed homeless:

160

people were in improvised homes, tents or sleeping outdoors;

630

people were sleeping in crisis accommodation,

660

were sleeping on friends couches, and

2040

were in boarding houses.

¹⁵ Hanover comments in CoPP; CEO workshop, Oct 2007

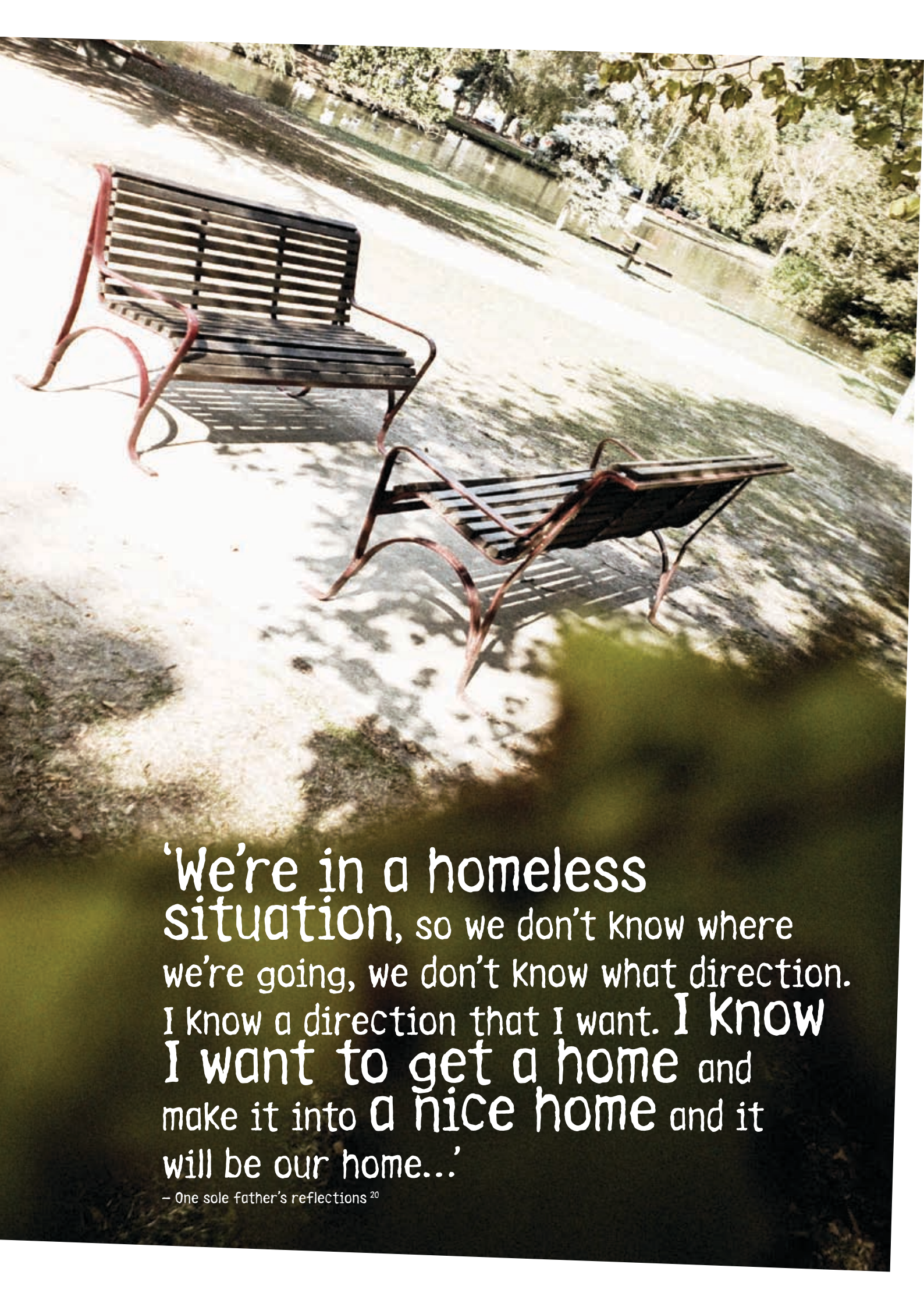
¹⁶ Figures from Homeground Housing Services, Aug 2008

¹⁷ ABS Census 2001

¹⁸ ABS Census 2001

¹⁹ Community Managed Rooming House Accommodation Review-report on discussions with Community Rooming House Providers and Tenants, DHS 2007

²⁰ Neill & Fopp 'Dad, where are we going to live now?... A report on sole father families who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness', Canberra Fathers and Children Services Inc & Dept FaCS, July 2004



'We're in a homeless situation, so we don't know where we're going, we don't know what direction. I know a direction that I want. I know I want to get a home and make it into a nice home and it will be our home...'

- One sole father's reflections²⁰

What is Council's commitment?

CITY OF PORT PHILLIP COMMUNITY PLAN – VISION STATEMENT 2007-2017

“The goals of social equity, economic viability, environmental responsibility and cultural vitality remain central to our desire to foster a sustainable and harmonious future. We acknowledge there is a shared responsibility to ensure that everyone, regardless of age or cultural or socio-economic background, can access services that meet their needs and can participate in community life. We want our Council to demonstrate leadership in community participation, strategic planning, advocacy to other levels of government and accountability to the community”

Council is committed to ensuring people can access services that meet their needs, including residents imminently at risk of becoming homeless, or living in unsafe accommodation, or sleeping rough.

City of Port Phillip's visions and initiatives are underpinned by four pillars; social equity, economic viability, environmental responsibility, and cultural vitality. With consideration to all four pillars, Council recognises that:

- Housing is a basic human right, and that anyone can experience homelessness;
- Some people need a range of support to prevent them becoming homeless and some need ongoing support to sustain housing outcomes in moving out of homelessness;
- Council needs a co-ordinated response that addresses the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

The Local Government Act 1989 (LGA) clearly defines a Council's role, objectives, function and commitment to ensuring safety, community cohesion, social, economic and environmental viability, and sustainability of the municipal district, and quality of life for all members of the community.

What have we been doing so far?

Port Phillip Council has established links with a range of local homelessness services, health organisations and housing services within the Port Phillip region; some state-wide, others region specific, which are dedicated to responding to people experiencing homelessness and housing distress.

There is also established social housing – some state owned and managed, some community owned and/or managed. Council has worked consistently to maintain access to affordable housing within the City of Port Phillip, directly support older people at risk of becoming homeless into housing, and respond creatively to housing needs. Council is also an active partner through our different networks with local community and mainstream services covering all ages, family structures and disabilities.

Council's role is varied but includes:

- **Advocacy and leadership**
Participation in Ministerial Housing Council, Housing Justice Roundtable, Inner Urban Rooming House Working Group, Inner city regional affairs network, submissions to State and Federal Government eg. Submission to Consumer Affairs Victoria Residential Issues Stakeholder Consultation 2007 and Federal Housing Affordability Inquiry 2008 and Homelessness Green Paper Review 2008.
- **Planning and Facilitation**
Community Housing Program, Community Grants Program, Port Phillip Housing Trust, Neighbourhoods Program position, Information card developed for Commonwealth Games, Place Management and strategic planning eg. Fitzroy Street Precinct Taskforce; Youth services network bi-monthly meetings and annual planning session.
- **Research and evaluation**
Homelessness Protocol Evaluation 2006.
Development of Homelessness Protocols.

- **Coordination and partnerships**

Collaborative service agreements
eg. Employment and training for those aged 15-24, Arts Programs, Sudden Rooming House Closures Protocol; Sponsorship Housing Agreement with Office of Housing.

- **Service provision**

Social Meals Program – Rooming Houses, Park Re-design Workshops, Family Support Programs, Enhanced Maternal and Child Health, Housing Information and Support Service.

- **Statutory regulation**

Building and Environmental Health Inspections of Rooming Houses, Local Laws and Parking Enforcement, Homeless Protocol.

There was a man who was homeless for 10 years, but he actually owned a property in St Kilda. Due to his mental illness he had so much clutter in his flat he could no longer enter it. He was issued a notice to leave as he also hadn't paid his rates. CoPP Housing Information and Support Worker referred his case to us and we liaised with other people in the Council regarding this matter and got the Council to set up a payment plan while we worked on moving items out and now this person is living back in his flat" Mental Health Outreach Worker

Source: Homelessness Protocol Evaluation 2006

What are our current protocols and processes regarding homelessness in public places?

Since 2001, City of Port Phillip has established within the Council Community Amenity: Local Law No. 3 2003, and the Procedure and Protocol Manual; a range of processes council officers need to consider when regarding a person who is camping or may be sleeping rough. This Homelessness Protocol has prompted contact to be initiated with a range of community outreach services as an initial response.

In addition, leading up to the 2006 Commonwealth Games, the *Victorian Protocol for People who are Homeless in Public Places* was devised by the State Government with input from a number of local Councils including City of Port Phillip, Victoria Police, Department of Justice, Commonwealth Games and Department of Human Services.

There is currently a great deal of discussion exploring the association between excessive alcohol, use of substances and violent behaviour that is exhibited by different sections of the community, and how we should respond in Australia. In Port Phillip there has been ongoing debate and divergent views regarding homelessness and social housing being associated with anti-social behaviour in public spaces.

In 2007, Victoria became the first state in Australia to install a Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. From January 2008 all public authorities such as councils needed to ensure their decision making policies and procedures comply with various rights outlined in the charter. Some that are particularly relevant to homelessness:

- Freedom of association and movement;
- Freedom from discrimination;
- Protection of privacy and reputation.

Council must demonstrate transparent decision making, be clear when the execution of statutory roles such as public health, local laws or safety measures have led to any incompatibility with these rights being enacted, and ensure Council could not have reasonably acted differently.

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A PERSON WHO IS, OR APPEARS TO BE, HOMELESS, YOU SHOULD ONLY RESPOND IF:

- They request assistance;
- They appear distressed or in need of assistance;
- They are sheltering in circumstances that threaten the health and safety of themselves and/or others (eg in derelict buildings);
- They are unaccompanied children who appear to be under the age of 15;
- Their behaviour threatens their safety and security of people around them;
- Their behaviour is likely to result in damage to property or to the environment;
- Their safety is threatened by others.

Extract from the *Victorian Protocol for People who are Homeless in Public Places 2006*.

How has the Strategy been developed?

The City of Port Phillip Homelessness Action Strategy 2008-2013 has been developed with reference to

- Research findings and program evaluations locally, across Victoria, nationally and internationally;
- Council, State and National Housing and Homelessness Strategies;
- Legislation: State, National and International;
- Demographic trends and statistical data; and
- Feedback from a wide range of stakeholders including people who have experienced homelessness.

Council Initiatives and Plans that have informed the Strategy include:

- Community Plan 2007-2017 developed in wide consultation with the community, identified ten top priorities (strategic objectives 2.1, 2.3, 2.4) including “to support those who are disadvantaged, disabled and low income to remain in the city and support affordable housing, even as the city grows more affluent”
- Council Plan 2007-08 (strategic objective 4.1.8) “Continuing partnerships that promote opportunities for more affordable housing”
- Health & Wellbeing Plan 2007-2011: “Developing a strategy on homelessness that integrates initiatives addressing social isolation and health inequities amongst residents living in rooming houses, sleeping rough or temporarily in crisis accommodation”
- Housing Strategy 2007-2018 which recommended development of “a strategy to coordinate responses to the needs of people experiencing homelessness. (Recommendation 8.1)
- Drugs Strategy 2006: “There is an urgent need to expand public housing programs so that crisis accommodation as well as longer-term housing is available”
- Ageing Well Strategy 2006-2016: “Build a better city that offers an age-friendly living environment, facilitate access to a diverse range of housing choices to assist ageing in place.”
- Social & Cultural Policy & Planning Framework 2003-2006 Aims to: add value to established non-profit community or non-government organisations that provide activities/programs predominantly for the benefit of Port Phillip residents; encourage community initiative by providing the opportunity to pilot new models/ programs; and strengthen the community fabric by fostering equitable access to resources through the development and encouragement of skills, knowledge, independence and participation.
- Youth Development Framework 2004: Identified there are often difficulties, challenges and pressures for young people exacerbated through disengagement from education, increasing shortage of secure and affordable accommodation, access to stable employment opportunities, social disconnection and transience or short-term residency. Port Phillip aims to be a “community that supports the health, wellbeing and positive development of young people.”
- Creating A Child Friendly Port Phillip 2005-2009 recognised: “Children feel secure in adequate housing and have access to quality food and water”, and “a child’s right to grow in healthy and supportive community environments.”
- Fitzroy Street Precinct Action Strategy 2007: “Reduce street sleeping”, and “Improve and support the management of affordable housing within the precinct.”



(Photo courtesy of 'Start all Mural Experiments!' K. Gorjanicyn, 2007)

“When I became sick with cancer, being a single woman left me no means of support except a sickness benefit. I lost my job, and couldn’t continue my studies and my low income had to cover rent, food, electricity, transport and medication. Pretty soon the only accommodation I could afford was a rooming house and this presented a new list of problems that hindered my long term health needs... when seeking help from agencies, even the chemist that was dispensing my special medication, people were aware of the house where I lived and judged me accordingly; that because I lived there I must have a drug problem or a mental illness, when in fact it was the only form of accommodation I could afford... It showed me that without one’s health; even a small issue like housing becomes one of the most important issues in your life. Without appropriate housing, my rights to proper health care were taken from me. Without housing, my rights to be treated fairly within society were taken from me.”

– Lisa, 34 years²¹

²¹ Names have been changed

What are the most pressing challenges?

Changing requirements in State legislation

- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006: from January 2008 need to ensure Council's decision making policies and procedures comply with various rights outlined in the charter.
- Victorian Building Act 1993: Building regulations 2006 which require that by June 2009 fire safety standards such as installing sprinklers will be mandatory – this includes many of our large private rooming houses and hotels.
- There is proposed alignment of the definition of rooming houses within the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and Health (Prescribed Accommodation) Act 2001 that are expected to bring more of these houses under the Health legislation requiring registration with Council.

Current demand on services

So far our research and consultations have highlighted the continuing lack of suitable housing for many groups in our community, who are unable to secure affordable and safe accommodation at pivotal points of need, and as a result the escalation of demand for this assistance from:

- Women (especially those who are sole parents with accompanying children escaping family violence),
- Youth – 18-25 including students,
- Young people under 18 (particularly those escaping abusive homes),
- Single adults(particularly those with a disability)
- Older single adults and couples
- Men who are sole parents with their children,
- Families (particularly large families)

We need to advocate to State Government departments for prevention strategies, in particular Child Protection, Mental Health and Justice to stem the flow of people in their systems into homelessness.

Separate Worker Networks

Networks loosely exist within different service systems – there needs to be more opportunity to communicate across sectors, particularly linking mainstream services to housing providers and homelessness services.

In summary, we need:

- Better understanding of local data and of what is happening;
- Greater involvement of people who have experienced homelessness in developing responses;
- More access to permanent, affordable and suitable housing for people who are experiencing homelessness. Reducing homelessness in Port Phillip fundamentally is dependent on this.
- More integrated communication, outreach and coordination between homelessness and crisis support, health providers, family support, income support, youth support, aged services and housing providers. We need to connect the services that you may need if facing housing stress and/or experiencing homelessness.

What are the key issues that have come from our research and consultation?

Key Issues that have come from our work in developing this strategy are the needs for

1. Enhancing community awareness and understanding of homelessness to particularly ensure inclusiveness and fairness for all in the community,
2. Replenishing levels of long term affordable housing due to the significant loss of private rental locally over the past decade,
3. More integrated services to assist people to sustain tenure once secure accommodation has been found and to have greater opportunities to participate in their community,
4. Research and implementation of prevention and early intervention programs, particularly within mainstream services to alert when individuals and families are in housing stress at risk of losing their housing and becoming homeless,
5. Greater connection between mainstream services and a range of homeless services and housing providers,
6. Prevention of further trauma and illness after research has found that 66% of people experiencing homelessness had developed a substance use problem, and 53% had developed a mental illness *after they became homeless.*²²



²² Chamberlain, C.; Johnson, G; and Theobald, J.; Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenge, Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT University, 2007

How will we respond to factors contributing to homelessness?

The Port Phillip Homelessness Action Strategy 2008-2013 sets out an integrated framework and a clear direction in going forward together by:

- Council taking a leadership role in working inclusively with stakeholders across the community to oversee the ongoing development and monitoring of the Homelessness Action Strategy;
- Establishing ways of measuring and documenting change and success, starting with collating local agency data and communicating levels of need across sectors;
- Identifying potential opportunities for Council services in responding to the factors contributing to homelessness in partnership with individuals, community organisations, businesses and other levels of government;
- Being clear how we can better support people currently experiencing homelessness and those at risk of becoming homeless to more fully participate with services and their community.

Council will aim to do this by taking a lead role in enhancing community awareness; facilitating early intervention and prevention, and co-ordinating local planning through five key objectives and a range of actions over the next five years.

Council actions are outlined in Part Two of this document – the Action Plan which has been informed throughout the development of the strategy from a review of research, local demographic data and trends and feedback from a range of services and members of the community.

It is not expected that all of the actions in the Homelessness Action Strategy will require new resources as many will be achievable from more effective communication and co-ordination across Council and existing networks in the community. However some of the larger projects will require sourcing funds from emerging National and State Policy initiatives.

Implementation and monitoring of progress:

The Action Plan identifies key internal Council partners to facilitate the identified strategies and initiatives. This is a first stage, with the next steps over the coming 12 months being the engagement of relevant external stakeholders to support and in some cases, lead some of the strategies.

A report card will be presented to the Council on an annual basis from December 2009.

How will we respond to factors contributing to homelessness?

HOMELESSNESS ACTION STRATEGY KEY

1. Enhance community understanding of homelessness

2. Actively advocate and support Homelessness Service system

3. Facilitate integrated planning in the provision of supportive housing

4. Coordinate planning and facilitate research

5. Integrate Council's own responses to homelessness



PART TWO

Action Plan

Short-term 1 year; medium-term 3 years
or long-term 5 years

I. ENHANCE COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Strategy

I.1 Developing communication projects to raise awareness and understanding of homelessness

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
1.1.1 Explore funding opportunities for communication activities	Community awareness program developed	1-3 year	Community Sector Strengthening Housing Info & Support
1.1.2 Facilitate a response to National Homelessness Inquiry Green Paper	Submission sent	June 2008	Housing Info & Support Housing Development
1.1.3 Explore opportunities for facilitating inclusive art and performance, street parties, sport	A range of creative events and activities developed and facilitated	1-3 years	Community & Health Development Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Housing Info & Support Social Support & Recreation
1.1.4 Develop an information booklet and material – posters, web page, fact sheets	Material developed with input from homeless advisers and services	1-2 years	Housing Info & Support Community & Health Development Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH)
1.1.5 Promote community and business philanthropy around the use of Port Phillip Gives Website	Expanded awareness and links within Council's volunteer and fundraising initiatives	3 years	Community Sector Strengthening
1.1.6 Explore potential of a community trust fund	Completion of investigation project	3 years	Community Sector Strengthening

I. ENHANCE COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Strategy

1.2 Promote and facilitate inclusive community events and spaces

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
1.2.1 2008 Homeless World Cup	Local event held during December	Dec 1-7, 2008	Community & Health Development Housing Info & Support
1.2.2 Mayor's Community lunch – Welcome to new Town Hall space	Lunch held	July 2008	Community Development Social Support & Recreation
1.2.3 Input to Annual Homelessness Memorial	Support planning and event	Annual	Housing Info & Support
1.2.4 Ensure Council facilities: libraries, gyms, community centres are inclusive and have information about support and housing resources	Support inclusive practice and resource material distributed	1 year	Housing Info & Support Library Services Community Facilities

Strategy

1.3 Facilitate awareness of Equal Service guidelines – responsible approaches to consumers experiencing homelessness 2007

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
1.3.1 Hold forums to inform a range of businesses of the Consumer Affairs Victoria resource material	Two forums held	1 year	Economic Development Community Sector Strengthening Housing Info & Support

I. ENHANCE COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF HOMELESSNESS

Strategy

1.4 Facilitate opportunities for increased participation in community for people who have been homeless and are experiencing homelessness, in particular participation in planning and evaluating strategic responses and initiatives

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
1.4.1 Explore partnering opportunities – peer support, Homelessness advisers and mentor programs	Mentor and consultative programs established	1-2 years	Community & Health Development Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Housing Info & Support Youth Services Enhanced Maternal & Child Health
1.4.2 Support links between homelessness services, housing providers & community and faith groups to support inclusion activities	Partnership opportunities identified and pilot implemented	3 years	Community Sector Strengthening Housing Info & Support
1.4.3 Explore housing for low income workers and for people who have been homeless, particularly youth programs such as the YP4 model integrating 4 areas – employment, housing, educational and personal support goals and Hospitality Employment and Training (HEAT)	Networking project developed to link services with homeless services and housing providers	3 years	Community & Health Development Housing Development Youth Services Housing Info & Support
1.4.4 Integrate housing opportunities with participation and inclusion programs	New integrated opportunities identified	2 years	Housing Development Community & Health Development Economic development Housing Info & Support

Strategy

1.5 Develop a local Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) responding to homelessness in public places incorporating Victorian Protocol from Commonwealth Games 2006

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
1.5.1 Establish local Homelessness round table to develop MOU	MOU developed	1-3 years	Local Laws Housing Info & Support Community & Health Development Parks & Gardens Youth Services

2. ACTIVELY ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT HOMELESSNESS SERVICE SYSTEM

Strategy

2.1 Develop integrated access to Crisis Accommodation and other emergency assistance

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
2.1.1 Evaluate partnership opportunities linking people experiencing homelessness to material relief, financial assistance and crisis accommodation	Pilot project better integrating all forms of assistance and accommodation	1-3 years	Housing Info & Support Community Sector Strengthening
2.1.2 Identify resources responding to young people at risk of homelessness, particularly same sex attracted young people	Specific initiatives considered linking homeless services, youth support and health	1-3 years	Youth Services Family & Children Services Housing Info & Support Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Community & Health Development
2.1.3 Develop a local information protocol for responding to individuals made homeless following a house fire or drought related building damage	Local sudden homelessness partnerships developed	1 year	Housing Info & Support Building Solutions

Strategy

2.2 Improve data of crisis and transitional housing stock

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
2.2.1 Develop ways of communicating issues facing transitional housing and crisis accommodation	Monitor and evaluate new Opening Doors model and review of shared data systems	1-3 years	Housing Info & Support

2. ACTIVELY ADVOCATE AND SUPPORT HOMELESSNESS SERVICE SYSTEM

Strategy

2.3 Review strategies to address loss of rooming house stock and capacity to respond to closures, including review of adaptation to legislative changes.

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
2.3.1 Monitor Rooming House numbers	Rooming house numbers are reviewed.	Annually	Housing Info & Support Housing Development Environmental Health Building Solutions
2.3.2 Review Rooming House Closure Coordination Protocol	Rooming House Closure Protocols are reviewed	Annually	Housing Info & Support
2.3.3 Evaluate impact of changing legislation on rooming houses	Communication of monitoring	Ongoing	Housing Info & Support Environmental Health Building Solutions

3. FACILITATE INTEGRATED PLANNING IN THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Strategy

3.1 Advocate for a supportive housing approach to housing for people experiencing homelessness i.e. coordination of adequate support and housing provision.

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
3.1.1 Review current supported housing – Rooming House Plus, Supported Residential Services, Psychiatric Disability, Residential Care	Review of supportive accommodation	1 year	Housing Info & Support Ageing, Diversity, Policy & Partnerships Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH)
3.1.2 Explore feasibility of developing new and emerging housing models	Feasibility study considered	1-3 years	Community Sector Strengthening Social Planning Ageing, Diversity, Policy & Partnerships Housing Development Housing Info & Support
3.1.3 Explore opportunities to increase support in the management of private rooming houses	Advocacy project to support expanded models into rooming houses	1-3 years	Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Housing Info & Support Coordinate planning housing/support models

Strategy

3.2 Co-ordinate planning housing/support models

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
3.2.1 Council to facilitate CEO bi-annual forums	Bi-annual forums held	1-3 years	Social Planning & Policy Housing Info & Support
3.2.2 Explore establishing a working group with Inner Melbourne Action Plan (IMAP) partners opportunities to establish new supported housing	Working group established	2 years	Housing Development Housing Info & Support
3.2.3 Review current networks across the homelessness services and housing provider sectors	Review of Port Phillip & Stonington Housing Information Network	1 year	Community Sector Strengthening Housing Info & Support

4. COORDINATE PLANNING AND FACILITATE RESEARCH

Strategy

4.1 Develop a broader sub-regional Homelessness Plan with agreed targets.

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.1.1 Identify and facilitate key stakeholders across the community in a group to oversee the development and monitoring of the plan	Homelessness Action Group established and targets considered	3-5 years	Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Social Planning & Policy Community & Health Development Housing Info & Support
4.1.2 Follow up Census 2006 figures, collate and promote Council Homelessness Service data	Collection and dissemination of data	1 year	Social Planning & Policy Housing Info & Support
4.1.3 Investigate research funding possibilities through National Homelessness Strategy	Funding opportunities identified and submissions made	1-3 years	Social Planning & Policy Housing Info & Support Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Community & Health Development
4.1.4 Developing a strategy for establishing the numbers of people experiencing homelessness	Strategy developed	2 years	Social Planning & Policy Housing Info & Support Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Community & Health Development

Strategy

4.2 Enhanced early intervention and integrated responses regarding individuals and families experiencing homelessness

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.2.1 Explore feasibility of services coordinating Individual Cases & Persons at Risk Register – particularly youth, families, people with mental illness who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless	Partners identified and feasibility study carried out	3 years	Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Housing Info & Support Youth Services Family & Children Services Community Care

4. COORDINATE PLANNING AND FACILITATE RESEARCH

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.2.2 Collaborate re local implementation of State initiatives: Family Violence Framework Reform, Opening Doors – Local Homelessness Common Access and Assessment framework, Mental Health Alliance Pathways program	Local partnerships and cross sector projects established	1-3 years	Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health (ISEPICH) Housing Info & Support Youth Services Family Children Services

Strategy

4.3 Advocacy and coordination regarding private rooming house issues

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.3.1 Continue involvement with Inner Urban Rooming House group	Four meetings attended annually	Ongoing	Housing Info & Support
4.3.2 Explore opportunities to input into reviews of Rooming House legislation – operation, regulation, standards	Follow on submission made to Consumer Affairs Victoria (CAV) consultation 2007	Ongoing	Housing Development Building Solutions Environmental Health Housing Info & Support
4.3.3 Facilitate initiatives to address health inequities amongst residents living in rooming houses	Continuing to support – social meals program; neighbourhood development, community building	Ongoing	Community Care Ageing, Diversity, Policy & Partnerships Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH)
4.3.4 Advocate for broader legislative response to poor housing standards	Advocacy regarding improved standards	3-5 years	Housing Development Strategic Planning Building Solutions
4.3.5 Explore incentives to acknowledge better practice	Promote information regards Registered Accommodation Association Victoria code of conduct and professional standards to local registered private rooming	1-3 years	Economic Development Housing Information & Support
4.3.6 Identify and respond to unsafe and unregistered accommodation	Strategy developed to locate unregistered operators/ houses	1-3 years	Building Solutions Environmental Health Housing Development Housing Info & Support

4. COORDINATE PLANNING AND FACILITATE RESEARCH

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.3.7 Expand communication with Police and Rooming House providers similar to an Accord model	Rooming House Accord developed	2-3 years	Local Laws Planning Enforcement Community and Health Development Housing Info & Support
4.3.8 Develop fact sheets: location of local rooming houses, details of management, what areas are Council responsibilities and what areas are State responsibilities	Fact sheets developed	2 years	Building Solutions Environmental Health Housing Development Housing Info & Support

Strategy

4.4 Research current models of early intervention and prevention eg. Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) advice approach, and other local models.

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.4.1 Advocate for expansion of Centrelink/Hanover HOME model in the inner South Metro region – assisting families who face difficulty maintaining tenancies or home ownership due to personal or financial circumstances	Advocacy communicated to relevant authorities	3 years	Family & Children's services Housing Info & Support
4.4.2 Explore research possibilities to consider child's voice in experience of homelessness	Pilot scoped	3 years	Family & Children's Services

Strategy

4.5 Improve social inclusion in the St Kilda/St Kilda East area

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
4.5.1 Participate in State government and community partnership project addressing community participation issues for people in transient and unstable accommodation in the area	Project funded from July 2008	3 years	Community & Health Development Inner South East Partnership in Community & Health (ISEPICH) Housing Info & support Community Sector Strengthening

5. INTEGRATE COUNCIL'S OWN RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS

Strategy

5.1 Council responding consistently across all services

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
5.1.1 Development of training and education modules regarding homelessness and complex needs of people	Training developed	1 year	Housing Info & Support Enhanced Maternal & Child Health Community & Health Development
5.1.2 Review Pathway system to avoid duplication	Pathway reviewed	2 years	Communications & Stakeholder Relations

Strategy

5.2 Identifying homelessness 'hot spots' within the municipality and making it easier for people in crisis to find out about assistance

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
5.2.1 Signage information: Crisis services, accommodation, meals and material aid. Also signage of the beach sweeper's routine, the risk to people experiencing homelessness and sleeping on Port Phillip beaches is of concern	Signage considered	1-3 years	Local Laws Parks & Open Spaces Building & Green Spaces Beach & Street Cleaning Housing Info & Support

Strategy

5.3 Ensure responses to homelessness across CoPP services are compliant with Vic Charter of Human Rights and Equal Opportunity requirements as a Public Authority

Action	Measure of success	Priority	Relevant partners
5.3.1 Review of Homeless Protocol, Policy and Procedures manual is compatible with Victorian Charter of Human Rights & Responsibilities into procedures and policies 2007 in response to Council responding to public place management	Review carried out	1 year	Local Laws Housing Info & Support
5.3.2 Develop material outlining rights of a homeless person, including details of Human Rights Legal Resource Centre, and Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission	Information material developed	1-3 years	Housing Info & Support

APPENDIX

Agencies attendance -2007/08 consultations

Port Phillip & Stonnington Housing Information Network – PPASHIN 21/9/07

Jewish care
Hanover Women's
Home ground
Office of Housing

Service Providers Work shop 1 – 26/9/07

ISEPICH
St Kilda Youth Services
Inner South community Health
Services
Port Phillip Community Group
St Kilda Community Housing
City of Port Phillip
Centrelink
Southport Community Housing
Sacred Heart Mission
Home Ground

CEO Consultation – 11/10/07

Hanover services
Open Family
Sacred Heart Mission
Salvation Army
Inner South Community Health
Service
Port Phillip Housing Association

Service Providers Work Shop 2 – 12/10/07

Homeless Outreach Psychiatric
Service
(Alfred Hospital)
Victorian Police
Catholic Parish of Port
Melbourne/Middle Park
Inner South Community Health
Services

Homeless Adviser Interviews at the 'Gatwick Health Times' – 7/11/2007

Matey
Chrystal
Cheryl
One separate interview not at
Gatwick with Kirra

Homelessness Consumer Forum – 5/8/08

Leisha
Bill
Kirra
Michelle
Van
Carl
George
Steve

Centrelink Windsor and Inner South Metropolitan agencies – 8/8/08

and

Port Phillip & Stonnington Housing Information Network – PPASHIN – 15/8/08

'To end homelessness means
a roof over your head, but
just as important is what kind of roof, who
else lives there and where it is'





CITY OF PORT PHILLIP

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