The Salvation Army
Tasmania Division
Feedback regarding the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010-2014

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The Salvation Army
Core Values

.columns

Hope

Justice

Community

Compassion

Human Dignity

Contact

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Introduction

This document contains feedback from The Salvation Army (Tasmania) regarding the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010-2014. It reflects the organization’s willingness to engage in consultation regarding social issues that impact on people who are homeless and disadvantaged. The Salvation Army seeks to address issues such as homelessness that reduce people’s ability to participate in the community and economy.

The Salvation Army supports an efficient and compassionate response to the needs of people who are homeless. The Salvation Army is compelled to advocate on behalf of people who are homeless in Tasmania. However, we also acknowledge the important contribution made by the government in terms of funding to Specialist Homeless Services (SHS) that provide emergency accommodation and transitional support to people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The Salvation Army welcomes the clear goals and targets set by the Tasmanian government to reduce the number of rough sleepers in Tasmania by the end of 2010. Clear targets will focus community attention and produce action that will reduce homelessness. The Australian Government has also committed to half homelessness by 2020.

The Salvation Army supports the targets that have been committed to in the National Partnership Agreement as they reflect the long-term objective of reducing homelessness and improving the lives of homeless people. Tasmania’s Homelessness Plan can achieve these targets if we adopt progress measures to address the needs of the homeless population.

We need to ensure that when services support clients with high and complex support needs there are incentives for them to engage and maintain engagement with the target population. These progress measures could include reference to sustainable outcomes such as how long homeless people or at risk households sustain their housing. Progress measures could initially provide a base line and then a progress or improving picture over time as programs are developed and current base funding is redirected towards targeted and outcome focused initiatives (see The Salvation Army 2009).
Background

In 1865 William Booth and his wife Catherine formed an evangelical group dedicated to helping people living in appalling poverty in London’s East End. Their ministry recognised the interdependence of material, emotional and spiritual needs. In addition to preaching the gospel, they became involved in the feeding and shelter of the hungry and homeless, and the rehabilitation of alcoholics.

Since those humble beginnings, The Salvation Army has, for more than a 100 years, continued to meet the needs of the homeless and disadvantaged in many communities around the world. The basic social services developed by the Booths have remained a visible expression of the Salvation Army’s religious principles and values. More than 30 million people each year receive support and assistance from services provided by organisation globally.

In 2009 The Salvation Army in Tasmania met the physical and community welfare needs of over 15,000 Tasmanians. There are currently many challenges facing community service organisations, including the large increase in the number of people seeking affordable housing, support and rehabilitation services over the past 18 months.

The increase in people seeking assistance can be attributed to the global financial crisis and the national shortage of affordable private rental and public housing. While the top 10% of income earners live on more than $1500 per week, the bottom 10% are forced to live on less than $200 per week. Out of this meagre allowance people need to pay for accommodation, food, clothing, heating, transport, and health related costs.

The increased level of need and the complexity of the social issues facing homeless people limit NGOs ability to respond appropriately. There is an unmet need for emergency accommodation, transitional and long-term support in Tasmania. The gap between the employed and disadvantaged is widening and this poses difficulties for disadvantaged and homeless people to access affordable, social or private rental accommodation.
Housing Matters

Bradbrook (1998, 5-7) suggests that the provision of accommodation is a central public policy issue. It is also in the government’s interest to facilitate good social housing outcomes, in order:

- To promote a sense of community, and participation in the community and economy.
- To ensure good quality housing stock. The maintenance of good quality housing stock requires minimum repair laws and excessive rent control laws for substandard housing.
- To ensure availability of affordable private rental and social housing. While private investment in the rental housing market should be encouraged, this alone is incapable of housing all categories of applicants. There is a need for more affordable social housing if homelessness is not to become a large-scale problem.
- To promote social, community and family stability. Social stability is fostered by ensuring that no form of discrimination is permitted in terms of access to private rental housing.
- To ensure access to affordable rental housing. The law must ensure that potential tenants are not precluded from rented premises by having to pay too many up-front costs prior to being allowed possession.
- To improve educational participation and standards. Education is advanced by home stability and by the maintenance of reasonable living conditions. It is impeded by the need to change schools as a result of a change of home, by inadequate or poorly maintained premises and by homelessness.
- To foster human dignity as article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights declares, people have the right to adequate housing which is a human right.

The Salvation Army recognises that affordable and secure housing provides the base from which individuals and families can gain a range of services including education, training and employment in order to participate fully in the community. We can only ‘achieve an overall reduction in homelessness by allowing access to adequate and sustainable housing’ (see Standing Committee 2009, xiv).
Social Inclusion

Social Inclusion is a relatively new policy framework in Australia. There is some theoretical discussion regarding its meaning, and debate concerning the actions that need to be undertaken in order to achieve ‘inclusion’ for people who are seriously ‘excluded’, such as the homeless.

Social Exclusion originated in France in the late 1990’s with an emphasis on social citizenship and social cohesion. It was suggested that concepts such as disadvantage and poverty were the outcome of a process of exclusion and they were inherently derogatory. It is a popular policy framework in the United Kingdom and European Union, which have invested a lot of energy and resources to develop indicators of social inclusion (or exclusion) to measure the health and well being of citizens.

TSA supports the adoption of a broad social inclusion framework to address homelessness because it affords an opportunity to address homelessness holistically, considering spiritual, social and material needs.

Social Inclusion also provides an opportunity to consider discrimination and stigmatization in relation to homelessness, and its role as a barrier to accessing support and community resources that might otherwise be considered a person’s right.

The Social Inclusion principles articulated by the Australian Social Inclusion Board (2008) have considerable applicability in designing responsive programs and flexible services to support homeless people.

The principles include three aspirations and eight approaches:

1. Reducing disadvantage
2. Increasing social, civil and economic participation
3. Developing a greater voice, combined with greater responsibility
4. Building on individual and community strengths
5. Building partnerships with key stakeholders
6. Developing tailored services
7. Giving high priority to early intervention and prevention
8. Building joined up services and whole of government solutions
9. Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy
10. Using locational approaches
11. Planning for sustainability
Adequate Funding

It’s clear that the current funding model and funding formulas do not reflect the complexity of homelessness and the cost of delivering homeless programs. They reflect some of the issues of working with this target group, as funding is episodic and somewhat fractured. The limited duration of support periods that characterise SHS crisis, transitional support and accommodation do not take into account the diverse circumstances of homeless people. Support and accommodation periods should be determined by the needs of the person rather than predicated by government benchmarks or funding models.

We support the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan’s desire for effective service responses. However, effective service responses are achieved when we recognise the complexity and diversity of homelessness work, and support creativity and flexibility in casework. We live in the context of a diverse and changing society and specific regions and target groups may have their own unique needs. Consequently specialist tenancy and support services need to be flexible enough to respond to the needs of individuals in a client focused approach. Rural and regional services need to be able to respond to local needs often where there are limited complimentary and/or mainstream services. There is a role for both the specialist homeless and mainstream services, and other specialist service systems (mental health, child protection, corrections and juvenile justice, alcohol and other drugs) to prevent and reduce the impact of homelessness. A key preventive role is to provide long term or ongoing support to prevent repeated cycles of homelessness.

We believe that a key responsibility for “turning off the tap” of homelessness rests with mainstream service systems that are working closely with specialist homeless and tenancy support services. We propose that stronger partnerships will need to be developed in order to focus these efforts. For example the capacity to focus on at-risk or recently homeless young people works best when the specialist homeless service receives timely referrals and works closely with the student services staff in the school. Many teachers only encounter homelessness occasionally and a good support system (prevention) will assist students with a range of issues not just homelessness. Prevention based on dedicated early intervention capacity is likely to be very effective. The same argument in broad terms can be addressed to other areas or points of early intervention and prevention.
Prevention & Intervention

We would suggest that prevention represents an area of homelessness that has generally been a failure. This failure is systematic and is due to the inadequacy of the funding of Specialist Homeless Services (SHS), lack of engagement by some mainstream services and the lack of administrative support provided by State and Federal governments in support of homeless people before 2007.

The funding provisions were inadequate as the funds provided to deal with homelessness were unrealistically low. Funding levels between services vary but still do not address the demand for emergency accommodation, cover the cost of providing that emergency accommodation, allow services to connect with mainstream services or prevent homelessness in the future.

It is clear that homeless people are big users of mainstream services, which could do more to make their services and systems more accessible to homeless people. However, The Salvation Army recognises that mainstream services are just that – mainstream. For mainstream services homelessness is generally a side issue in the context of their core business. Raising the awareness of mainstream staff about homelessness is possible and necessary. An increased focus and funding for appropriate transition points for homeless people leaving mainstream services will improve the opportunities for effective early intervention.

Community services achieve higher levels of success with people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness when they develop strong partnerships with mainstream providers. We believe that it is unrealistic to expect over stretched mainstream services such as hospital emergency departments to take primary responsibility for homeless people. Good service delivery to homeless people through mainstream services is best achieved in partnership with specialist homeless services.

While the same could be said for specialist homeless services in relation to child protection, custodial program areas including courts, prisons and juvenile justice, mental health and drug and alcohol services, we feel that there is an increased opportunity to prevent homelessness if a more sustained focus on partnerships is encouraged and resourced in these areas. It is unacceptable that any person should exit prison, the custodial or care systems into homelessness. In our experience long term support to prevent homelessness needs to be in place pre and post release.
Improved Connections and Partnerships

The Salvation Army recognises that in order to provide positive and lasting outcomes for homeless and family violence clients, organisations must work more collaboratively. There is a need for formal and informal partnership arrangements providing significant levels of integration, and a holistic approach to the provision of support services. The success of service responses to clients’ needs is made possible by practice partnerships. These partnerships include major hospitals, domestic violence refuges, mental health services, community health services, refugee advocacy organisations, legal services, counselling programs, transitional housing programs and Centrelink. The move towards more integrated and coordinated homeless service delivery could be focused by outcome driven imperatives.

The best partnerships are based on a mutual recognition of the inherent value of working together, rather than a commercial imperative, tendering opportunity or regional policy imperatives. It is important to recognize that practice partnerships take time and resources to develop. However, once they have matured, practice partnerships can provide significant individual and systemic outcomes for homeless people. This has been the experience of The Salvation Army’s XCELL and TSMP programs that have been working successfully with the Tasmanian Prison Service for several years to achieve good housing and support outcomes for ex-prisoners who are at risk of homelessness on release.

Supported accommodation is an essential element to Australia’s current response and is recognised internationally as being successful. Supported accommodation can provide a crisis or short-term response; a transitional role in assisting people who have experienced homelessness to a long term outcome; and long term support and housing. The system should not be structured as crisis-driven – a client should be able to move into long term or transitional support without first experiencing a crisis. Likewise, people who have become at risk of homelessness should not have to experience primary homelessness before accommodation and/or support can be obtained. Unfortunately, this is not often the case because homeless services are stretched and take referral from crisis services as services are targeted to those in most need. The link between crisis accommodation and referral to support means that many vulnerable clients who are not willing to enter a crisis shelter do not receive the support they need.
Improved Access & Client Focused Approach

The Commonwealth Government’s Green Paper on Homelessness recognised that effective programs wrap services around an individual with high needs. The Salvation Army recognises this as the best approach to working with homeless people. This means that the support works for the client rather than the client being required to find their own way from service to service. The support staff should not expect the client to comply with their expectations and requirements. Support staff should be flexible and responsive to the needs of the client. Client centered services are driven by the needs of the individual and not by the needs of the system or service providers. Services should not be constrained by rigid timeframes and narrowly defined service parameters.

Clients should be able to receive assistance early and effectively to ensure that their situation is not made worse by the service system. Instead their needs should be addressed as quickly and compassionately as possible. We need to encourage service providers to work with individuals to deal with issues and provide options or creative solutions to problems, which may not always conform to a limited or rigid set of guidelines. The client should be encouraged to make progress and achieve their goals. The adoption of a client-focused approach will reduce demand management systems that have been put in place in several service areas.

The desire for improved access to services requires cooperation and good communication. It needs to be based on mutual understanding and respect. Competition can enhance service delivery in the market place but it also has the capacity to undermine trust between services dealing with market failure. If we are to promote a greater level of practice partnership the role of competition should be used to enhance service delivery outcomes rather than drive down funding levels and quality.

The construction of 2000 new affordable housing units over the next five years is welcome. However it is the quality and level of support services that are provided to homeless people that will make the difference in terms of the achievement of successful tenancy outcomes.
Effective Service Responses

When clients are consulted about their engagement with and perception of services young people consistently indicate that:

- The quality of the relationship with a worker is more important than the actual service received.
- They want workers to treat them like human beings.
- Continuity of care with a worker is more important than diverse forms of care from multiple workers.
- There are insufficient housing services to meet their needs.
- Short tenure in crisis accommodation is highly destabilising.
- The current rates of income support are inadequate to maintain stable accommodation.
- Their experience of community care placements and foster care is overwhelmingly negative. (see The Salvation Army 2009)

In these contexts some clients have experienced physical or sexual abuse or have commenced drug use. Client experience of inpatient mental health services is generally more positive compared with client experiences of outpatient mental health care.

The Salvation Army understands the need for people to develop a sense of community and engage in activities that will build self-esteem and a sense of belonging. In many community services, this is achieved by involving disadvantaged people in activities they would not otherwise have the chance to experience. Often a bond is formed between the worker and client that has a profoundly positive impact on the client.

Good relationships are the foundation stone upon which successful service delivery to people who are homeless are built. It is most often the relationship and trust that is established between a worker and client that enables homeless services to assist where others (mainstream) are unable. The nature of these trusting relationships distinguish them from the formal and at times adversarial relationships in other sectors and should not be undervalued when determining cost and funding formulas.
The Salvation Army welcomes the government’s commitment to a whole of Government approach to address homelessness. We agree that if we are to end homelessness in Tasmania, then a sustained and significant effort must be made by all parts of the community and government to address the issue.

Staff in the key areas of community and government interaction must redouble their efforts to ensure that their clients don’t become homeless including, the primary and secondary school system, higher education, mental health, drug and alcohol programs, acute and primary health, juvenile justice, corrections and police, courts and prisons, child and family services including child protection and out of home care, aged care, disability services, public housing, income support and Centrelink, emergency relief programs, and financial counseling services. This requires improved knowledge and awareness of appropriate referral processes, practices and places.

Funding needs to be used as an incentive for community and government agencies to work collaboratively across silos to improve needs assessment and referral practices. Treasury bids in the above key areas must be audited for their contribution to achieving targets. However, simply making a good case for contributing to the reduction of homelessness is not enough, future budget bids in all these areas should be considered on the success of departments and programs in achieving their stated contribution to reduce homelessness.
Continuous Quality Improvement

The Salvation Army recognises the value of homeless service standards in order to achieve better client outcomes. Several government departments at both a state and federal level have developed service standards. There is a need to coordinate these jurisdictional efforts into one mutually recognised consistent set of service standards and to work towards quality assurance processes that support continuous improvement. This type of initiative builds on what has been done to date and would represent a component of sector infrastructure development. It will also reduce duplication and unnecessary bureaucratic processes that detract from client focused service provision.

The resource implications for community based organisations in developing and implementing accreditation systems needs to be noted and the need for adequate resourcing of this improvement function by government will ensure that homeless people receive consistent, quality services. The regulatory burden on many NGOs to comply with Quality futures has been significant. Therefore we suggest that the regulatory burden on non-government agencies needs to be streamlined and become a whole of government issues. The Salvation Army (2009) suggests that

- Human service standards should incorporate a continuous quality improvement approach
- Review and accreditation should be independent of government
- Peer review should be promoted
- A national approach to quality standards for human services should recognise and complement State standards
- There should be a COAG mutual recognition framework of service and organisational standards (intersector and interstate). This would effectively provide a national smorgasbord of standards with legitimacy in all States and Territories, with related agreement that States and Territories should not require compliance against a particular set of standards unless those standards are acceptable to all COAG members
- Australian human service standards should have a ‘systems’ approach to quality standards requirements including, for example, ongoing evaluation of how and what is being required of whom and to what effect.

- Community sector learning’s arising from external reviews need to be captured and discussed with government, including discussion of implications for service models, and funding models as part of a systematic approach to service quality on the part of government.

- There should be a research base to specific standards sets (possibly as a prerequisite to adoption or at least within the next three years for existing standards) that demonstrates the cost/benefit impact on client outcomes in the short, medium and long term, compared with other standards and no particular standards.

- Service users should be involved in the consultations and ongoing evaluation about service standards.

- Additional funding is required to a) enable services to undertake the additional activities involved in engaging with review processes without impacting existing service capacity, and b) purchase services of review bodies and cover ongoing costs of agencies’ engagement with those bodies (e.g. membership).

- Government homelessness departments and divisions should be reviewed against the same standards.
Conclusion

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to participate in the development of a Plan to tackle homelessness in Tasmania and we are excited by the actions outlined in the Tasmanian Homelessness Plan 2010-2014. Our commitment to partnership with the Government is genuine and our expectation is that the goal to half the number of rough sleepers in Tasmania by the end of 2010 will be achieved.

We support the government’s plan to increase affordable housing options and fund long-term specialist tenancy support for homeless people in order to promote ‘a fair go’ for all Tasmanians. Some homeless people need long-term support in order to reconnect with family members and friends, and to develop supportive networks within the wider community.

Adequate funding levels to leverage resources and provide a range of options are an essential component to effective case management and can prevent people from becoming homeless. Brokerage funds enable the SHS programs to assist client and families materially and to provide additional housing options and specialist support to meet individual needs.

We need to improve service processes and practices as well as address funding short falls and gaps in the homeless system within which we work if our mutual goals are to be realized. We urge the Tasmanian government to be bold, to think laterally and act creatively, to make the structural changes necessary to reduce homelessness, even if these changes are costly, difficult or unpopular.

It remains the strategic intention of the Salvation Army to continue to foster collaborative approaches in order to address the needs of homeless service users. We will work closely with government and other NGOs to make a positive difference in the lives of the homeless in Tasmania. We welcome the opportunity to work in a mutually respectful partnership with our community sector colleagues, government departments and politicians from all parties to end primary homelessness in Tasmania.
References


