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#### **HOUSING IS A HUMAN RIGHT**

The right to adequate housing is recognised in Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the ICESCR) as follows:

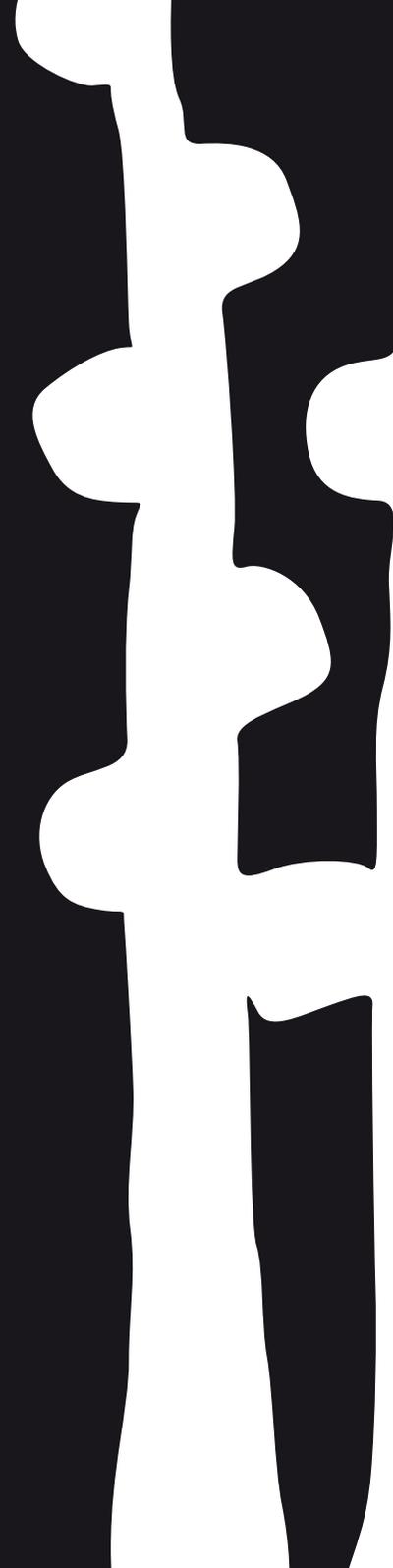
The present Covenant recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.

Homelessness, and in particular the treatment of homeless people in Australia, may also violate a number of other human rights. These include:

- The right to life
- The right to social security
- The right to privacy
- The right to freedom of expression
- The right to freedom of assembly and Association
- The right to vote.

Dan Nicholson, THE HUMAN RIGHT TO HOUSING IN AUSTRALIA,  
Produced for the Housing is a Human Right Project

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# ***Speaking Home Truths***

Homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula 08

**Thankyou's:**

This community report represents the experiences of people that are homeless, the work of the Mornington Peninsula Shire (MPS), in particular, the Social Planning and Community Development Team, Youth Workers, and Rangers, the Triple A Housing Committee, and the local community agencies who supported the project. Thanks also to Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, Vinnie's Kitchen Volunteers, Anglicare Rosebud, S.H.A.R.P.S. (Southern Hepatitis/HIV/AIDS Resource and Prevention Service), which is part of Peninsula Health, Fusion Youth Housing, Peninsula Youth and Family Services (Salvation Army), Rosebud, WAYSS Ltd - Housing and Support Services, Dandenong, WAYSS – Indigenous Housing Workers, Mobile Integrated Health Program - Peninsula Community Health Service, The Hastings Centre, Hastings, Housing for the Aged Action Group and Mornington Peninsula Domestic Violence Service (Good Shepherd, Hastings).

**And most importantly:**

A special thankyou to the people experiencing homelessness that participated in the interviews and shared their stories, this report belongs to them.

This report was prepared for the Mornington Peninsula Shire by Sabra Lazarus with contributions from other Shire staff, the Triple A Housing Committee, local community members and workers, and the myriad of researchers and projects that have preceded it.

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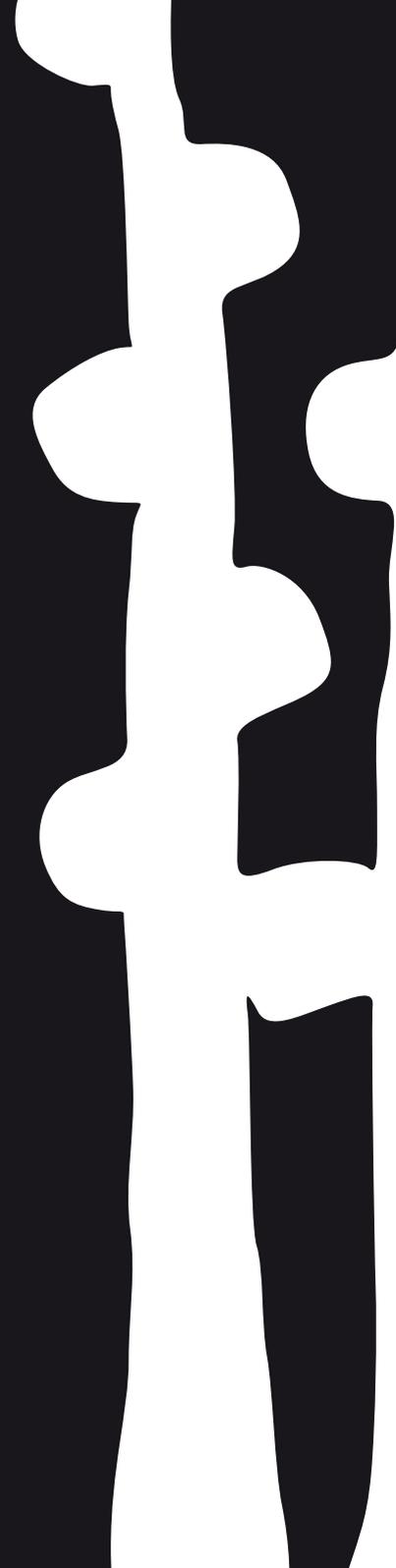
Speaking Home Truths

Social Planning and Community Development Team

Mornington Peninsula Shire

Adopted by Council August 2008

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INTRODUCING  
**HOME TRUTHS**

*"I've had enough, you get  
forgotten out there."*

(Andrew, Community Consultation 2007)

# Traditional Owners

The Mornington Peninsula Shire acknowledges Aboriginal people as the first Australians and that they have a unique relationship with the land and the sea. In the spirit of respect, the Shire recognises that the Mornington Peninsula is home to the Boon wurrung people who have lived here for thousands of years. Aboriginal people and elders of the Boon wurrung are members of the Kulin Nation and have traditional connections and responsibilities for the land on which Council meets.

## HOMELESSNESS, WHAT IS A HOME?

**Chris West**  
**Bunurong Man**

You know, until the Europeans arrived, homelessness didn't exist. No matter where a person was they always had a place and they had the right to that place and could stay as long as they desired.

Koori Society existed beyond the notion of personal ownership of land; a person or family may have responsibilities to the land. This did not form the basis of ownership but rather, tied the family through custodial responsibilities, to the land, which were in accordance with the customs and beliefs of the group.

Six generations ago, five women were kidnapped from Point Nepean and Westernport; my ancestors. They were taken to Tasmania and enslaved as seal

and mutton bird catchers. The next generations were incarcerated in missions, on Flinders and Cape Barren Island. They couldn't speak their language, marry without permission and they couldn't leave without marrying a white person.

My family felt a profound and all pervading sense of homelessness and disconnection. For many generations my grandmother and aunts would climb the highest point on the island and look northward knowing that was where they belonged.

That formed the circumstances of my family's home until my father met my mother. His mother, my grandmother, charged my parents with a special task: To return home. To go back to Bunurong land and bear children there, on country, to reconnect with the true home of their family. This is what has happened. I was born on my home country and my children were born on our home country.

My home is a modest place but I am glad that it's there. It's a place that identifies me, allows me to be me and to have some location that I can head towards: My place, the very basic human need; to have a place.

*"Where do you keep your stuff if you don't have a place? You just don't have much stuff."*

*"Give me your address so we can keep in touch."*

*"Um, sorry I will contact you soon, and let you know where I'll be."*

*"Can you bring in a bill or something with your name and address on it? No."*

Having a home or a place is not just about having somewhere to sleep; it identifies you, empowers you, gives you confidence and provides shelter not just from the elements but from society.

Without a place you will lose your kids, without a place you can't get Centrelink, without a place you will get locked up, without a place you will get bashed and robbed.

The importance of having a place cannot be stressed enough; the reasons for being homeless are as varied as the people themselves so a single answer will not work. I encourage the reader to keep in mind that it's not for us to judge the deserving poor, but to meet the basic needs of a fellow human.

Chris West, June 2008



**Yingarli (Original art)**  
Chris West

# Message from the Mayor, Cr Bev Colomb and Cr Tim Rodgers, Chairperson of the MPS Triple A Housing Reference Group

Having a home and belonging is important to all of us; it can provide a safe anchorage in the community. Our home is very much part of our personal and community context. It is part of what defines us. For most of us, to be homeless, is to be cast adrift.

The Mornington Peninsula is changing in its growth and development, social and economic patterns and trends, and while many of us may benefit from these changes, there are others in the community who struggle to maintain their homes, and others still, who have already been forced to leave their homes.

The Peninsula, as beautiful and bountiful as it is, is not immune from growing housing issues. The Mornington Peninsula has a number of other risk factors beyond Melbourne metropolitan characteristics that increase the problems and complexities associated with homelessness and impending homelessness. Issues such as isolation and lack of transport, lack of diverse housing stock, limited employment and educational opportunities, and lack of localised social services and infrastructure.

We are all too aware of the increases in house prices, the lack of affordable rentals, increases in interest rates, increases in mortgage and loan defaults, but we are perhaps not so conscious of

the current incapacity of the Peninsula to meet the needs of households facing homelessness and households who are already homeless. Right now, local agencies are forced into providing tents to people and families who are homeless because there is no other solution.

Homelessness is a personal, family and community crisis. It brings pain to those it touches, to the people who are homeless, their friends, family or the people charged with the task of helping them find accommodation and support. Homelessness results in community trauma.

Individuals, families, young people, older people, people experiencing ill health and indigenous people, are all part of the Peninsula's homeless population. In many instances, homelessness on the Peninsula is hidden. It is hidden in tents along the foreshore where the homeless blend in with holiday makers, it is hidden on the couches across the Shire where young people, in particular, move between friend's houses, it is hidden in some caravan parks, where the majority of people live with little or no security, it is hidden in cars parked at night along the ocean and bay beaches and it is hidden in unsafe houses where people live with the constant threat of violence or inappropriate housing.

All levels of government, Federal, State, and Local, should be working together in partnership with the community and other stakeholders, on a comprehensive housing strategy to deal with the increasing housing issues affecting our communities. We need a strategy of partnership that targets more affordable, appropriate and available housing for people on low incomes, and those at risk, as we move further into an increasingly fragile housing market.

Not all is lost however; this report gives us an opportunity to open our eyes and our hearts to the home truths, to hear the voices of the people and households excluded from the basic human rights of housing and support. The rights that you and I take for granted as we go home tonight to the safe place we call our home. This report also provides us with fodder, to encourage government, community and business, to work together, to act now, before it becomes impossible to reverse the damage being done to households being squeezed out and left behind by an inadequate and unjust housing system.

Signed



**Mayor, Councillor Bev Colomb**  
(2007/8)



**Triple A, Chairperson ,  
Councillor Tim Rodgers**  
(2007/8)

# A Reflection: Sabra Lazarus, Project Worker

During the process of researching and writing this report the question - why write a report has been my constant companion. Some local residents have asked the question with a note of incredulity – their experience of the Peninsula delivers a home truth that describes homelessness on the Peninsula as a marginal issue – the unfortunate fate of a few wayward souls.

Others recognise homelessness as part of the Peninsula community. They acknowledge it as an entrenched part of the way we live - a rather large and unpleasant community burden experienced by the homeless, their friends and family, and the people who work with them. It's heavy and can feel insurmountable. For them a report is a feather light tool destined to fail - just another report that will sit on a shelf gathering dust. Their home truth comes packaged with a sense of powerlessness and frustration. How many reports does it take to change the world?

Although each person's home truth is guided by their unique Peninsula perspective - by what they see - collectively the community response I have encountered speaks of a universal home truth that articulates that home matters, that belonging is important, and that housing is an irrevocable human right.

This universal truth is unfortunately, in 2008, a community aspiration rather than a community reality. Across Australia, and on the Peninsula, homelessness is becoming an increasingly urgent social issue. So while we as a community celebrate the abundance of the Peninsula, its natural beauty, the social, cultural and economic opportunities it delivers, for many of its residents and visitors, there is another less celebrated Peninsula landscape. This is a place where individuals, families and sections of the community, increasingly experience the acute pain of an economic and social system that is so dysfunctional that it is unable to facilitate the basic necessity of life; shelter which is safe, affordable, appropriate and accessible.

Peninsula people are homeless; they do live in unsafe and inappropriate housing – cars, tents, benches, dilapidated houses, housing where family members can be subjected to the violence of others, housing that is insecure and unaffordable. People who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, live in environments that play havoc with their health and well being and can cause physical and mental ill health. They live in places and spaces that can exacerbate their vulnerability, and position them socially on the 'other' Peninsula - where you are likely to be excluded from community life and where you are more than likely to be forgotten.

In this report, it is the stories of the people that are homeless that bust open our perceptions of homelessness. The report identifies the need for changes to the housing system, and the need to provide increased community resources to support people in crisis. It also highlights that personal and family circumstances can change quickly in a volatile and market driven society. A culmination of events at the wrong time in your life, a death in the family or family breakdown, retrenchment or a series of missed work opportunities, mental health issues, increasing stress and depression, could put you at risk of homelessness, and it can make you both homeless and sick, at a time when you need the most stability in your life.

This report also tells the stories of the workers who diligently attempt to respond to increasing housing and support demands, whilst under resourced in a housing system that has few, or no, vacancy signs for people coming through their doors. Homelessness can make them sick too, when they are increasingly unable to provide responses to households in dire circumstances.

So why research and write a report on homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula?

The need for action is pressing, rather than homelessness disappearing, it is increasing. Currently there is no indication that things will improve, on the contrary, there is every indication that things will get worse. It is an absolute necessity that together we script and acknowledge our home truths: that as a community we listen to each other and that we are heard. People's stories and their words can be powerful agents of change, but their power is only realised when we as a community listen and act.

Put simply this report is a community call for action. We look to all levels of government to work in partnership and to provide the leadership and resources to build a new home truth – in which a home on the Peninsula is accessible, affordable and appropriate, and makes homelessness a thing of the past.

Sabra Lazarus, Community Health and Well Being Development Officer, Mornington Peninsula Shire, 2008







## PART 1 **WITHOUT A HOME**

*“We focus on weakness rather than strengths, homeless people have amazing talents and amazing skills. People can take a superior stand...there is a big stigma. But the person can be a father, a lover - a human being, not just homeless but a lot more.”*

(Indigenous Housing Worker,  
Community Consultation 2007)

# About Speaking Home Truths

## HOMELESSNESS IS ABOUT PEOPLE

This report represents some home truths about homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula. It is about people's lives, their hopes and fears. It's about our community and how we live together, our hopes and fears.

The home truths articulated throughout this report are often confronting and may challenge what we thought we knew about our community. The people you will meet and their stories are poignant and moving - the person camping on the foreshore, the worker who is frustrated by the inadequacies in the system. These stories validate the need for immediate action, speaking directly to our shared humanity and the need for us to continue to strive together for a just and equitable community.

There are many voices on the Peninsula which articulate what it means to be homeless. This report is a vehicle for those voices to be heard. It includes the voices of people who have experienced homelessness and those who are currently homeless, the voices of paid and unpaid local workers who support the homeless on the Mornington Peninsula. It also draws on voices from outside our immediate community who speak to the issue of homelessness; its causes, consequences and solutions.

This report is about documenting our home truths, it's about reflection, and most importantly, it's about hope, action and change. As one worker put it:

*"On the Peninsula there is a lack of affordable, appropriate and accessible housing and what we have talked about today is the anecdotal evidence... we have anecdotally expressed to you our frustrations of trying to get people into housing, what the whole gamut of homelessness means primary to tertiary. And okay you can put another 10 billion dollars worth of housing onto the Peninsula but is it actually going to solve the problems? To some degree it will reduce some of the problems but it's a societal thing and the whole of the Peninsula society needs to take responsibility for this issue, and it's your report and hopefully this will move us towards a better understanding of what homelessness really is. It's not your gentleman in an overcoat sitting and drinking out of a paper bag, it's bigger than that and hopefully, your profile, your report will identify that people in homeless situations are there because of a whole lot of reasons."*

(Community Health Worker,  
Community Consultation 2007)

## HOME MATTERS

*"I evaded your questions about home at the time and remember when we lived with the grandparents. I felt safe and nurtured then. They had a beautiful garden with flowers and fruit trees...even chooks and bees."*

(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

*"Home to me is a place that's safe, where I can be myself, where I can stuff up and I can still be loved; where I know that people care for me, and I can be different but be safe and loved at the same time."*

(Centre Coordinator, Youth and Community Organisation, Community Consultation 2007)

*"We speak of an inner need to find a place we belong, a place to call home, a place we feel safe, a place that is ours."*

(Suzuki, David: The Sacred Balance,  
Allen and Unwin 1999)

Home is much more than the physical structures that form a house. Home is a place where we feel safe; it's our belonging place, a place where we feel connected. Home describes our relationships to people and place. Our family and friends, our daily interactions - the person at the shop check out, the children's crossing supervisor - our informal interactions

with the people around us. It's about the built and natural environment and how we interact with it, the schools that our children attend, the local shopping centre, the parks and beaches. It is what we know and what we feel.

# Defining Homelessness

Developing a working definition of homelessness is about drawing together a number of issues, ideas and perspectives. In this report, homelessness is about human rights, about belonging, it's about individual circumstances and housing. This report recognises that housing insecurity and the fear of homelessness impact on the health and well being of individuals, families and the community.

## ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS

### Housing is a human right:

*"Access to safe and healthy shelter is essential to a person's well being and should be a fundamental part of national and international action. The right to adequate housing as a basic human right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights."*

(Agenda 21: United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development, June 1992)

### While:

*"Australia has ratified almost all of the major international human rights covenants and conventions, including those on civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights, children's and women's rights, racial discrimination and refugees..."*

(Nicholson, Dan: The Human Right to Housing in Australia, Produced for the Housing is a Human Right Project, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions 2004)

The Australian government has failed in many instances to meet its obligations to implement these rights.

## ABOUT THE PERSON

While homelessness is a social justice issue, it is also very much about the person - their family, their friends, their communities. The sum of their life experiences, their disappointments, hopes and dreams. There isn't one homeless story, there are many, and each one is unique:

*"For example, we had a bloke last week who had been a successful man – through no fault of his own the business went belly up. Now he is homeless and at risk of further homelessness. He has rental accommodation, but has financial and mental health issues (due to the business collapse). He is at risk of becoming homeless again in the next 6 months."*

(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

## ABOUT YOUR BELONGING PLACE

Homelessness is much more than 'houselessness'. When you are homeless you risk losing your connection to community, the people and places you know, the things that sustain you - your belonging place. Belonging is central to our identity. We use it to describe our place in the world, and others use it to understand our place in the world. Belonging attaches meaning to the person. In practice, this means that finding and or maintaining a home is very much about a sense of place. For a young man who was homeless and experiencing chronic mental ill health, networks and community were more important than shelter:

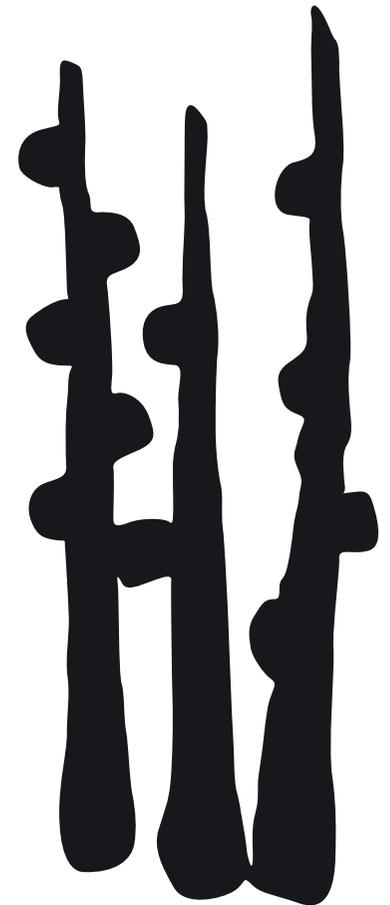
*"I organised and suggested the Rosebud foreshore – he didn't want to go to Rosebud, he has his networks around Hastings – it didn't work, he just up and left."*

(MPS Youth Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

Andrew, who at 60 was sleeping in a tent and moving around Hastings, had an equally strong emotional response to living in Hastings. When asked about whether Hastings felt like home he responded with a simple:

*"My word...yeah."*

(Andrew, Community Consultation 2007)



## ABOUT HOUSING

Even though a house isn't always a home, in the main, we associate home with housing. Our housing, its location, its amenities, its costs and tenure all impact on what 'home' means. Housing is central to an understanding of homelessness.

The Mornington Peninsula Triple A Housing Policy (2002) identifies 3 key indicators with respect to housing:

### Affordable

*The proportion of income spent on housing costs;*

### Appropriate

*Suitability of dwelling size, the physical condition of the dwelling, design of the dwelling, its sustainability, security of tenure and its location are factors contributing to how 'suitable' a house may be to meet particular needs;*

### Available

*Ability of a household to obtain housing that is both affordable and appropriate to their needs.*

The Victorian Department of Human Services, Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), considers a person to be homeless if they do not have access to safe, secure and adequate accommodation. Under this definition a person is considered homeless if:

- "they are without shelter;
- the only housing they have access to damages or is likely to damage their health, or threatens their safety, including domestic violence;
- the housing marginalises them through failing to provide access to adequate personal amenities;
- the housing does not provide the economic and social supports that a 'home' would be expected to provide;
- the housing places them in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing;
- they have no security of tenure; and/or,
- they are living in accommodation provided by a SAAP agency or any other form of emergency accommodation, such as transitional or refuge housing."

Under this definition, homelessness may occur when housing is unaffordable and/or inappropriate and/or unavailable.

Affordable, appropriate and available housing can be elusive on the Peninsula:

*"Often we find in the area that the housing that is affordable is unstable itself or substandard, it's poorly maintained holiday accommodation where families are often booted out come peak season."*

(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)



## **A CONTINUUM OF HOMELESSNESS**

People's experience of homelessness can be defined in relation to the sustainability of their housing. Such definitions take into account what access to housing they have:

*"We use a definition that is widely used which is primary, secondary and tertiary, and we work with that range of people in our program. The primary people are actually living rough, secondary we would describe as people who might be living in caravan parks, couch surfing, and tertiary people are living in places where people can be evicted at anytime - people living in caravan parks can be evicted at anytime."*

(Community Health Worker,  
Community Consultation 2007)

Others define homelessness by identifying three domains which constitute a home:

*"Having a home can be understood as: having an adequate dwelling (or space) over which a person and his/her family can exercise exclusive possession (physical domain); being able to maintain privacy and enjoy relations (social domain); and, having legal title to occupation (legal domain)."*

(Meert, Henk; Edgar, Bill & Doherty, Joe:  
Towards an Operational Definition of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion,  
Cambridge University, EHNR {European Network for Housing Research} Conference 2004)

Within this definition being homeless is the loss of the physical, social and legal domains of your home.

## **DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS**

**The Mornington Peninsula Shire acknowledges that:**

- Housing is a human right;
- Homelessness is about people and their connections to community; and that
- Local, state and federal governments, and the community as a whole, have a shared responsibility to ensure the provision of safe, secure, affordable, appropriate and available shelter to all community members.

**MPS defines homelessness as including:**

- Unsustainable housing;
- Insecure housing;
- Inappropriate housing;
- Unsafe housing, for example, where violence is present; and the

**The MPS recognises that:**

- People experience homelessness differently, and/or the absence of housing, unsustainable and or inappropriate housing, and living with the ongoing fear of losing housing;
- The impacts of homelessness go beyond the homeless individual and/or family to include other family members, friends and advocates;
- Homelessness affects the health and well being of individuals, families, friends and advocates and in so doing impacts on the wider community.

# Homelessness is everywhere

## AN OVERVIEW

### AUSTRALIA

*On any given night in Australia 100,000 Australians are homeless. More than one third are teenagers (aged 12-18) and young adults (aged 18-25) – that's at least 36,000 homeless young people.*

(Australian Bureau of Statistics: Counting The Homeless 2001, Australian Census Analytic Program 2003)

*Over half (58%) of Australians who experience homelessness are males.*

(Australian Government Green Paper, Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness, May 2008, pg15)

*Over the past 20 years, the number of homeless teenagers has doubled to 22,000.*

(Chamberlain, Chris; Johnson, Guy & Theodald, Jaqui: Homelessness in Melbourne Confronting the Challenges, Centre for Applied Social Research RMIT University, February 2007)

*The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is Australia's primary response to homelessness, it provides temporary accommodation and support services to homeless people, and is funded jointly by the Commonwealth and State governments. But every night, one in two young people who seek a bed from SAAP is turned away because services are full. Currently SAAP services are so inadequate*

*that only 14 per cent of all homeless people have access to a bed on any given night.*

(National Youth Commission: Australia's Homeless Youth Project Summary, Shark Islands Production 2008)

*Nearly half the homeless population in Australia continue to live temporarily with friends and relatives.*

(Crisis Help Network, Melbourne Homeless Services, www.melbourne.org.au )

*Homeless services are seeing an increasing number of working families who can't pay their rent, with nearly 50% of people using these services across Australia being private renters in trouble.*

(St Vincent de Paul Society: Don't dream its over, housing stress in Australia's private rental market, July 2007)

*In 2006 homeless services helped more than 45,000 families with accommodation and other support services and another 115,000 single adult and young people.*

(St Vincent de Paul Society: Don't dream its over, housing stress in Australia's private rental market, July 2007)

*Over the past 5 years there has been a 30% increase in the number of families with children being assisted by homeless services.*

(St Vincent de Paul Society: Don't dream its over, housing stress in Australia's private rental market, July 2007)

*Couples with children have the highest turn – away rate off all client groups, at 77.9% compared to 53.6% for all groups in 2005 – 2006, in the main because there was insufficient accommodation available. This accounted for 68% of all valid requests – higher than for all other groups at 59 %*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2007) Homeless people in SAAP, Supported Accommodation Program National Data Collection Agency Report 2005- 2006, HOU, pg 49 and pg 24)

*In a 2004 report, Hanover Welfare Services estimated that "...at least 90,000 Australian children experience homelessness each year. Of these nearly half are aged 0-4 years and 46% are primary school age."*

(Kolar, Violet: Home First: A Longitudinal Study of the Outcomes for Families who have Experienced Homelessness, Hanover Welfare Services 2004)

*Across Australia 68,000 people under the age of 18 accessed homeless services in 2006, 20% were unaccompanied by a parent or carer.*

(Melbourne City Mission's Youth Homelessness Campaign 2007: A Plan for Change, August 2007)

*In 2005/06, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were over-represented as Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) clients relative to their population size. Nationally, 17.1% of SAAP clients identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, despite representing only 2% of Australians aged 10 years or over. In Victoria, 5.4% of SAAP clients were indigenous, even though they represent less than 1% of the total Victorian population.*

(Office of the Victorian Government Architect: Which Way? Directions in Indigenous Housing Conference, Royal Australian Institute of Architects 2007)

*An estimated 157,200 people received accommodation or other support services for the homeless in 2004-05 through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) - the major government response to homelessness in Australia - and of these 56,800 were children, according to a series of reports released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Media Release: Pre-schoolers and older teens significant users of SAAP homeless services, Australian Government, January 2006 www.aihw.gov.au)

*Very young children had the highest rate of use with one in every 51 children aged 0-4 years accompanying a parent or guardian to a SAAP agency at some time during 2004-05.*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Media Release: Pre-schoolers and older teens significant users of SAAP homeless services, Australian Government, January 2006 [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au))

*Older teens (18-19 year olds) also had a relatively high usage rate, with one in every 70 people in this age group using a SAAP service during 2004-05. The rate was higher for teenage girls than boys, with one in every 56 females aged 18-19 years accessing services.*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Media Release: Pre-schoolers and older teens significant users of SAAP homeless services, Australian Government, January 2006 [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au))

*The Institute of Health and Welfare Homeless SAAP clients with a disability 2002-03 report found that roughly one-quarter of the 97,600 SAAP clients in that year had a disability.*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Homeless SAAP clients with a disability 2002-03, Australian Government 2004 - 2005)

*In 2001, 8,580 older people accessed the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Programme (SAAP) nationally – representing 9.3% of all SAAP clients. However, estimates in a 1996 report suggest there may be in excess of 250,000 older people at risk of homelessness because the number of older people on fixed incomes and relying on insecure housing is increasing.*

(Judd, Bruce; Kavanagh, Kay; Morris, Alan & Naidoo, Yuvishi: Housing and support options for older people who are homeless, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Research and Policy Bulletin, Issue 61, August 2005)

*A total of 176,321 households were on waiting lists for public rental housing on 30 June 2007, of which 11,700 households were classified as being in 'greatest need'. This represents 7% of all households on waiting lists.*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Public Rental Housing 2006-07, Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, National Data Report, January 2008)

*Of the 333,085 households who lived in public rental dwellings at 30 June 2007 288,686 (87%) received a rental rebate, that is, they paid less than market rent for the dwelling (referred to hereafter as 'rebated households'). The remaining 44,399 households (13%) paid market rent. Of the 287,961 rebated households for which complete rent and income details were known, approximately four-fifths (82%) paid more than 20% but no more than 30% of their income in rent, while around one-fifth (18%) paid 20% or less of their income in rent.*

(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Public Rental Housing 2006-07, Commonwealth State Housing Agreement, National Data Report, January 2008)

*In 2005 – 2006, 5% of people leaving prison or juvenile justice institutions sought accommodation from SAAP services. During the same period 12% of SAAP clients reported that they had spent time in the criminal justice system and 11% reported that they had repeated admissions to correctional facilities.*

(Australian Government Green Paper, Which Way Home? A New Approach to Homelessness, May 2008, p24)



## VICTORIA

*In Victoria it is estimated that 23,000 people are homeless.*

(Cooke, Dewi: Homelessness a cause not a result of drug abuse, The Age, 5 February 2007)

*In 2001, there were just over 155,000 Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients in Melbourne.*

(Randolph, Bill & Holloway, Darren: Assistance and the spatial concentration of low income households in metropolitan Australia, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, UNSW-UWS Research Centre, AHURI Final Report No. 101, June 2007)

*In 2004 it was estimated that in Melbourne over 4,000 people were physically homeless.*

(Crisis Help Network: Melbourne Homeless Services [www.melbourne.homeless.org.au/statistics](http://www.melbourne.homeless.org.au/statistics))

*“The homeless population is becoming more diverse with more young people, women and families experiencing homelessness.”*

(Johnson, Guy: On the Move: A longitudinal study of housing stability of the homeless in Victoria, RMIT University, July 2006)

*In Victoria, more than 7,000 young people aged 12 to 24 sleep ‘rough’ on any given night.*

(Melbourne City Mission’s Youth Homelessness Campaign 2007: A Plan for Change, August 2007)

*In Victoria, the rate of indigenous homelessness is 5.1 times the rate in the non-indigenous population. In 2001 it was estimated that 21.7 indigenous people per 1,000 of population were homeless, compared with 4.2 non-indigenous people.*

(Office of the Victorian Government Architect: Which Way? Directions in Indigenous Housing Conference, Royal Australian Institute of Architects 2007)

*In 2001, 5.1% of Victorian indigenous households experienced overcrowding compared with 1.8% of non-indigenous households.*

(Office of the Victorian Government Architect: Which Way? Directions in Indigenous Housing Conference, Royal Australian Institute of Architects 2007)

*“30% of the homeless had mental health issues. However, just over half (53%) developed mental health problems after becoming homeless.”*

(Chamberlain, Chris; Johnson, Guy & Theobald, Jacqui: Homelessness in Melbourne Confronting the Challenges, Centre for Applied Social Research RMIT University, February 2007)

*43% of people who are homeless in their sample had problems with substance use; however 66% developed the problem after becoming homeless.*

(Chamberlain, Chris; Johnson, Guy & Theobald, Jacqui: Homelessness in Melbourne Confronting the Challenges, Centre for Applied Social Research RMIT University, February 2007)



# In Our Community- The Mornington Peninsula



## PERCEPTIONS

Homelessness is not something that we associate with a Peninsula lifestyle. It jars with the perception that the Peninsula is all about 'holiday lifestyles' made up of beaches, rolling hills and vineyards. This point was not lost on the majority of workers. One worker, commenting on the community understanding of homelessness on the Peninsula, had this to say:

*"I don't think they do. I live down here and I don't think that people really understand, unless I think if you're working in the services I think a lot of it is pretty well hidden really. Sometimes you get people coming here for other reasons and they will say – I didn't think that there was any homelessness down here. Where they would expect it, in Frankston or Collingwood, you say Rosebud and no one ever thinks that there would be any issues down here. Well, I was the same when I moved down. I thought there would be less problems down here."*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

## THE REALITY

Getting an accurate picture of the number of people who are homeless on the Mornington Peninsula at any given time is difficult. (see Appendix One) Many people who are homeless do not appear in statistics - staying on friend's couches, and floors, or living in cars, for example. Others camp through the season, blending in with holiday makers and return the following season, still others live in houses which don't meet their needs – the local woman with her family living in a converted chook shed in the back yard or the indigenous family sharing an overcrowded house with family and friends. Some live in insecure housing, like caravan park residents, who in the main have little or no legal protection.

While homelessness was not a key focus of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Triple A Housing Policy Final Report in 2002, the report noted this about homelessness:

*"Homelessness in Victoria (July 2000), prepared for the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, estimated a total of 254 homeless persons on the Peninsula, estimating a*

*rate of homelessness of 23 persons per 10,000 of population. This is comparatively lower than the 28 persons per 10,000 of population estimated for suburban Melbourne as a whole and significantly lower than the 173 persons per 10,000 rates for inner Melbourne.*

*The findings of this study also indicate that the majority of homeless persons on the Peninsula are defined as being of secondary homelessness, people who move frequently from one form of temporary housing to another including people using various types of emergency accommodation. It also includes people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own. Only 11 of the total homeless on the Peninsula are considered to be in a state of primary homelessness, that is, without conventional accommodation."*

(Mornington Peninsula Shire: Triple A Housing Policy, Final Report, June 2002)

To date this remains the most current statistical profile of homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula. It is extremely difficult to capture a statistically accurate picture of the number of people who are homeless on the Peninsula and/or to make any accurate comparisons over time. How homeless statistics are currently collected is part of the explanation. At the moment regional statistics are collected, and each support agency across the Peninsula collects their own homeless statistics, however, how these statistics are collected differs across these agencies. There is no single statistical source to describe the Mornington Peninsula. A further complicating issue is that many people experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity will not appear in the statistics. For example, young people couch surfing. The outcome is that in 2008, a combination of the 2006 Census and regional and local agency statistics provides some statistical insights into what's happening in our community, who is experiencing homelessness and who we might expect to it in the future.

## LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2006 Census provides a demographic overview of key issues and township trends:

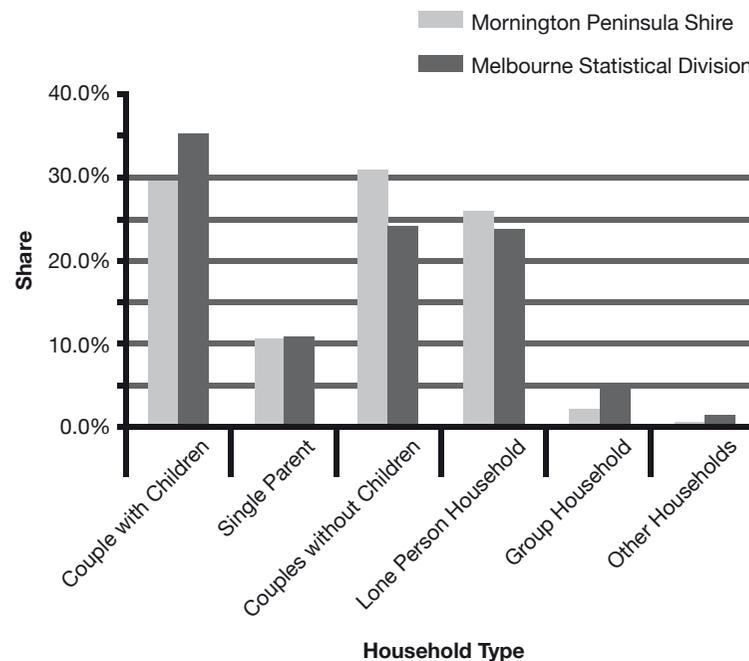
*“Population growth from 124,891 in 2001 to 131,632 in 2006 (enumerated population excluding overseas residents).”*

The population growth between 2001 and 2006 was 6741 people. The growth across the Shire is uneven with most growth (approximately 60%) occurring in Mornington East. In contrast, some township areas saw only minimal changes in their populations. For example, only 79 new residents moved into Township Area 13, which includes Rosebud, Rosebud West, McCrae, Boneo, Fingal and Cape Schank, between 2001 and 2006.

## Families

The 2006 Census tells us that families are a key aspect of the Peninsula population. There are a significant proportion of couples with children (in the main these families are younger) and couples without children.

An analysis of family types in the Mornington Peninsula Shire in 2006 found that overall 41.1% of total families were couples with child(ren) and 14.9% were one-parent families, compared with 48.4% and 15.4% respectively for the Melbourne Statistical Division.



**Table 1 Share of Household Types**

(Source: MPS Website; [www.mornpen.vic.go.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.go.au), Community Atlas, <http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=118>)

Similarly looking at household types reveals a comparable (to Melbourne Statistical Division) proportion of family households, but a larger proportion of lone person households, but a larger proportion of lone person households. Family households accounted for 68.5% of total households in Mornington Peninsula Shire while lone person households comprised 24.7% (68.6% and 22.7% respectively for the Melbourne Statistical Division).

Family household and lone family household types are not evenly distributed across the Shire. Areas with a higher concentration of family household types

are: Area 9 – Mt Eliza (79.4%), Area 12 – Red Hill, Red Hill South, Merricks North, Main Ridge and Arthurs Seat (78.1%), Area 5 – Somerville, Tyabb, Baxter and Pearcedale (76.9%), Area 10 – Mt Martha (76.2%), Mornington East (76%) and Area 2- Bittern and Crib Point (75.4%). Areas with the highest concentration of lone person family household types are: Area 13 – Rosebud, Rosebud West and surrounding areas (33.9%), Area 8 -Mornington, Moorooduc and Tuerong (32.3%), Area 11- Portsea, Sorrento and Blairgowrie (30.9%), Area 14 – Rye, Tootgarook

and St Andrews (27.3%) and Area 3 – Dromana and Safety Beach (26.7%).

Between 2001 and 2006 in the Mornington Peninsula Shire, there was an increase in the number of family households (1,488) and an increase in lone person households (1,165). As family and lone person households are very much a part of Peninsula living, we might anticipate these households may also be experiencing increasing housing stress and potentially homelessness, and that they may appear at our local agencies seeking assistance. This is supported anecdotally by local agencies.

AREA	2006	2006%	2001	2001%
Area 11 Portsea - Sorrento - Blairgowrie	810	20.4	676	17.6
Area 3 Dromana - Safety Beach	1,151	15.1	960	12.9
Area 12 Red Hill - Red Hill South - Merricks North - Main Ridge - Arthurs Seat	393	14	290	9.7
Area 14 Rye - Tootgarook - St Andrews Beach	1,487	13.6	1,412	13.3
Area 4 Flinders - Shoreham - Point Leo	272	13.6	202	11.1
Area 13 Rosebud - Rosebud West - McCrae - Boneo - Fingal - Cape Schanck	2,256	12.3	2,279	12.4
Area 8 Mornington - Moorooduc - Tuerong	1,699	12.3	1,396	10.4
Area 1 Balnarring - Balnarring Beach - Merricks - Merricks Beach - Somers	445	11.9	366	9.8
Area 10 Mount Martha	1,007	11.3	780	9.3
Area 9 Mount Eliza	1,786	11.1	1,396	8.7
Area 5 Hastings	654	9.2	506	7.8
Area 7 Mornington East	1,123	8.3	663	6.9
Area 2 Bittern - Crib Point	435	7.3	333	6
Area 15 Somerville - Tyabb - Baxter - Pearcedale	1,074	7	738	4.9

**Table 2 60 - 69 yr Olds  
Mornington Peninsula**

(Source: MPS Website; [www.mornpen.vic.go.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.go.au), Community Atlas, <http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=118>)

### Older and Smaller Families

The 2006 Census tells us that overall on the Mornington Peninsula there is a considerable ageing/older population, with larger numbers of older smaller families, and with significant gains in the 50 -59 and 60 – 69 age group. A lot of our ageing population live in Area 13. (See Tables 2 and 3)



AREA	2006	2006%	2001	2001%
Area 13 Rosebud - Rosebud West - McCrae - Boneo - Fingal - Cape Schanck	847	4.6	645	3.5
Area 8 Mornington - Moorooduc - Tuerong	448	3.3	357	2.7
Area 3 Dromana - Safety Beach	226	3	178	2.4
Area 11 Portsea - Sorrento - Blairgowrie	112	2.8	96	2.5
Area 7 Mornington East	366	2.7	210	2.2
Area 4 Flinders - Shoreham - Point Leo	48	2.4	20	1.1
Area 9 Mount Eliza	388	2.4	270	1.7
Area 10 Mount Martha	168	1.9	91	1.1
Area 5 Hastings	132	1.9	148	2.3
Area 14 Rye - Tootgarook - St Andrews Beach	184	1.7	161	1.5
Area 1 Balnarring - Balnarring Beach - Merricks - Merricks Beach - Somers	56	1.5	30	0.8
Area 15 Somerville - Tyabb - Baxter - Pearcedale	203	1.3	100	0.7
Area 12 Red Hill - Red Hill South - Merricks North - Main Ridge - Arthurs Seat	13	0.5	28	0.9
Area 2 Bittern - Crib Point	31	0.5	33	0.6

**Table 3 People aged 75 yrs and Over Mornington Peninsula**

(Source: MPS Website; [www.mornpen.vic.go.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.go.au), Community Atlas, <http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=118>)

An ageing population can place increasing demands on, and competition for, appropriate housing, and greater demand for supported accommodation and smaller properties.

The Census also identified an increase in the number of lone persons (up by 1,165) living on the Peninsula. They occupy 24.7% of total households in the Shire. We know that the majority of people in these lone households are older residents (See Table 4) and there are some concerns about the capacity of these lone elderly households to sustain their housing in the longer term as they confront issues of affordability, issues around the suitability

of their housing to meet their needs, isolation and the need for support.

Local agencies support this proposition, reporting an increased demand for housing for the aged:

*"I think that we now see a higher percentage of aged clients than ever before who are struggling to pay rent, or who have properties that they cannot maintain as their health deteriorates. And I think mental health...we are just seeing an increase in clients with mental health issues and that just plays havoc with the rest of their lives. Well, I think it's a major issue."*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

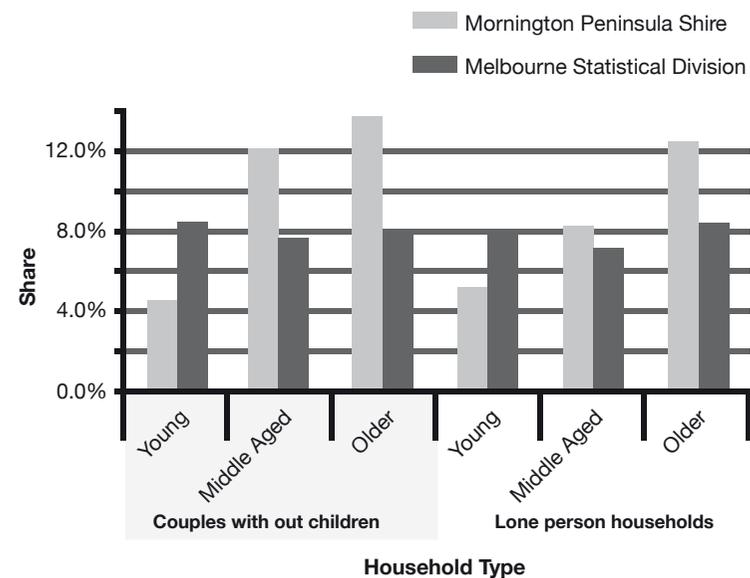


The community need for smaller and affordable housing for older people, has been picked up by caravan park developers. Caravan parks are changing, the older style caravan and annex is being replaced by the 'mobile' home or transportable home. Developers are touting the affordability and amenity of caravans as a retirement life style opportunity, marketing caravans as permanent dwellings to older people. There are approximately 500 households currently living in caravan parks across the Peninsula.

Caravan parks are also occasionally used for crisis accommodation, although workers report an increasing reluctance

from park managers to take on crisis tenants. There are also concerns about the appropriateness of housing people in crisis in parks. What is clear is that most of the 500 households living in parks under current legislation live with ongoing housing insecurity and, as such, are at risk of homelessness. Current legislation fails to protect their interests and they are still subject to eviction without a reason after 120 days. The Department of Consumer Affairs in conjunction with the Office of Housing have taken submissions from stakeholders on all aspects of the caravan park industry as part of their residential accommodation strategy. We are currently awaiting the outcomes of these submissions.

**Table 4 Share of Smaller Household Types by Age**  
 (Source: MPS Website; [www.mornpen.vic.go.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.go.au), Community Atlas, <http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=118>)





### Dwelling Type

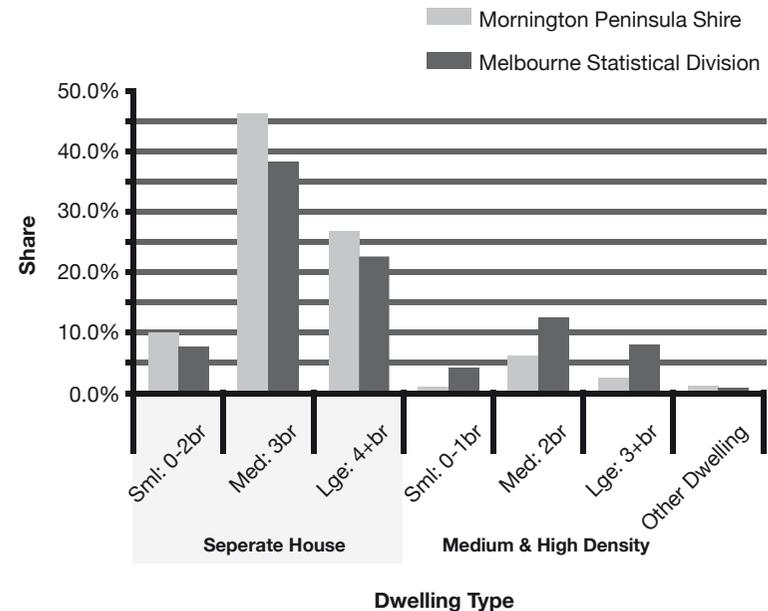
Overwhelmingly, the type of housing available on the Peninsula is medium sized, 3 bedroom separate house dwellings, followed by larger houses with 4 bedrooms. The Peninsula has very little medium to high density housing stock (See Table 5), and where this does exist it is usually high density senior's retirement villages, such as the Village Green in Rosebud West. The Peninsula also lacks access to appropriate affordable 1 and 2 bedroom flats or apartments.

In 2006, there were 46,858 households which occupied a separate house on the Mornington Peninsula, while 5,296 occupied a medium density dwelling, and 47 occupied high density flats and apartments.

Of the households on the Mornington Peninsula Shire in 2006, 60.2% occupied a separate house, 6.8% occupied a medium density dwelling; while 0.1% occupied high density dwellings, compared with 66.1%, 19.6%, and 5.7% respectively in the Melbourne Statistical Division.

The largest changes in the type of dwellings occupied by households in Mornington Peninsula Shire between 2001 and 2006 were for those occupying a:

- Separate house (+3,347 dwellings); and
- Medium density dwelling (+414 dwellings)



**Table 5 Share of Dwelling Stock by Type**

(Source: MPS Website; [www.mornpen.vic.go.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.go.au), Community Atlas, <http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=118>)

Notwithstanding the increase in medium density dwellings, there is a lack of medium to high density single one and two bedroom dwellings on the Mornington Peninsula. This may help explain (along with limited education and employment opportunities) why the Peninsula is losing people in the 25 – 34 age group. Local agencies report a difficulty in accessing any housing for singles on the Peninsula.

## DESPERATELY SEEKING ASSISTANCE

Data collected by local support agencies provides a snapshot of what is happening in our community, and is indicative of the levels of community distress around finding and maintaining a home on the Peninsula.

### Vinnie's Kitchen

Although Vinnie's Kitchen does not serve meals exclusively to people who are homeless, they make up a significant proportion of their diners. Vinnie's Kitchen has supplied food to locals in need since 1992 and between 1992 and December of 2006 has served 65,215 meals. In 2006 Vinnie's delivered 4,555 meals to an average of 21 people per meal session.

### The Hastings Centre

The Hastings Centre provides information referral and support to the local community. It is a not for profit community organisation offering free and confidential services and is staffed by local community volunteers. The Centre currently assists in excess of 1,600 individuals and families with a total of 8,750 contact enquiries per year, including 'one off' and repeat client visits. The Centre provided the following information as a snap shot for September and October 2007: 47 new clients sought assistance during September and October; 27 people in September being 17 women and 10 men; and, 20 people in October, being 15 women and 5 men. Overall, during this period, the Hastings Centre saw more women (32), than men (15). They described their housing as:

TYPE OF HOUSING	SEPT. 2007	TO 8TH OCT.
Ministry Rental	5	2
Ministry Private Owner		1
Private Rental	8	6
Private Owner	5	4
Caravan Park		
* Lev. 1 Homeless	4	2
** Lev. 2 Itinerate Homeless	5	4

#### \* Level 1 HOMELESS

Includes clients experiencing the following:

##### Type

*Clients living out of car, friend's place etc.*

##### Reason

*Forced or unforced eviction (Domestic violence, house/flat being sold, outcome of Tenancies Tribunal ruling)*

#### \*\* Level 2 ITINERATE HOMELESS +

Includes clients experiencing the following:

##### Type

*Some form of very short term temporary accommodation eg. friend's caravan, friend's couch, tent, but also + (including emergency accommodation, transitional housing)*

##### Reason

*As above and including loss of employment, changed status in the relationship, financial circumstances. Of the 46 people who defined their housing status 15, or approximately 33%, were homeless.*

**Table 6 Clients Housing Status 1<sup>st</sup> Visit (New Clients Presenting Sept. to Oct. 2007)**

(Source: The Hastings Centre)

In addition, in September 2007, 16 out of 27 (60%) new clients attending the Hastings Centre presented with accommodation related issues and, in October, 8 out of 20 (40%) new clients presented with accommodation related issues including domestic violence, relationship breakdown and rental stress. Indicative 2008 statistics would suggest that there is yet another increase in clients presenting with homelessness, rental and mortgage stress issues.

### **Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre**

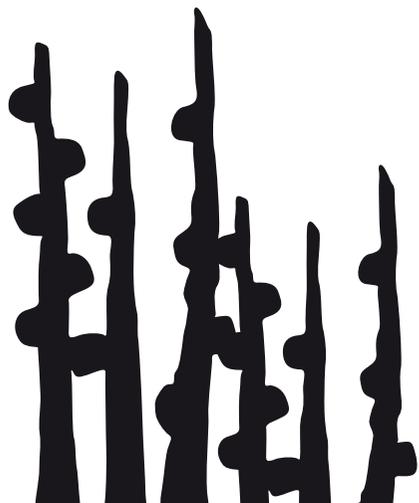
The Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre (SPCSIC) is a crisis support, assessment and referral, community information, advocacy and negotiation centre. The Centre also provides counselling, a budget support program, legal aid advice, tax help and a needle and syringe exchange program. In 2006 the Centre had 7,702 contacts and 16,947 enquires. Of these enquiries 1,409 were identified as accommodation-specific enquiries, approximately 8.5%. In 2007, the Centre had 8,038 contacts, and 15,001 enquiries. Of these 916 or

approximately 6% related specifically to accommodation enquiries, however, as Table 6 indicates, other reasons for contacting the Centre, such as for emergency relief, are also part of the struggle to maintain a home. Commenting on housing trends and the people they are currently seeing, the Centre Manager said:

*“Our clients are reporting that affordable secure housing is becoming scarcer on the Southern Peninsula. We have certainly had an increase of clients unable to secure housing they can afford and who are often*

*having to look for housing that is greater than 55% of their income. This seems to have increased over the last 12 months. A number of clients told us last year that they did not wish to relocate as they would not be able to secure housing at a similar cost to their current housing. This year people who are relocating are facing an even higher priced rental market, but often do not have the option to stay in their current housing as they are exiting due to owners developing their properties.”*

*(Centre Manager, Community Consultation 2007)*



	1/1/06 TO 31/12/06	1/1/07 TO 31/12/07
Total Centre Contacts #	7702	8038
Total number of enquiries by Centre Contacts *	16947	15001
Break down of enquiries		
Support Enquiries	3920	3848
Health Enquiries	1661	1781
Legal Enquiries	803	741
Employment Enquiries	559	272
Income Enquiries	2161	1835
Accommodation Enquiries	1409	916
Community Organisation Enquiries	768	463
Emergency Relief Enquiries (Singles)	1835	1687
Emergency Relief Enquiries (Families)	1010	1065
Consumer Enquiries	398	284
Economic Development Enquiries	117	50
Environment Enquiries	0	0
Education Enquiries	288	175
Recreation Enquiries	85	31
Transport Enquiries	873	622
Administration Enquiries	1060	1231

**Table 7 Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre**

(Source: Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, 2007)

# Total Centre Contacts - Each time someone contacts SPCSIC by telephone or in person a count of ONE is added here regardless of the number of people they may represent.

\*Total number of enquiries by Centre Contacts - each time a Centre contact has an enquiry about a 'topic' a count of one is added to that 'topic'. This figure represents the total number of areas that information and/or assistance has been given.

**Example:**

Client X presents at the Centre for assistance. A count of ONE is added to Total Centre Contacts. Client X asks for assistance because of a pending housing eviction. They also need information about the bus system so they can get to VCAT, and some material aid for some school books for their child. A count of ONE is added to EACH of the enquiry 'topics' of Support, Accommodation, Transportation and Education, increasing the Total number of enquiries by Centre Contacts by 4.

### **Mornington Community Information and Support Centre**

The Mornington Community Information and Support Centre provides support and information services to residents and visitors to the Mornington District. The Centre provides free, confidential, impartial, independent and community based information and support on a range of issues including:

- Pensions, allowances and concessions
- Legal matters
- Youth issues
- Leisure and recreation activities
- Consumer affairs
- Accommodation and transport
- Environment
- Employment, education and training
- Health
- Needle/syringe program
- Immigration issues
- Emergency relief
- Internet and email
- Community Affairs

The Centre provided the following statistics for the 2006/ 2007 period which represent the number of housing specific contacts that the Centre had:

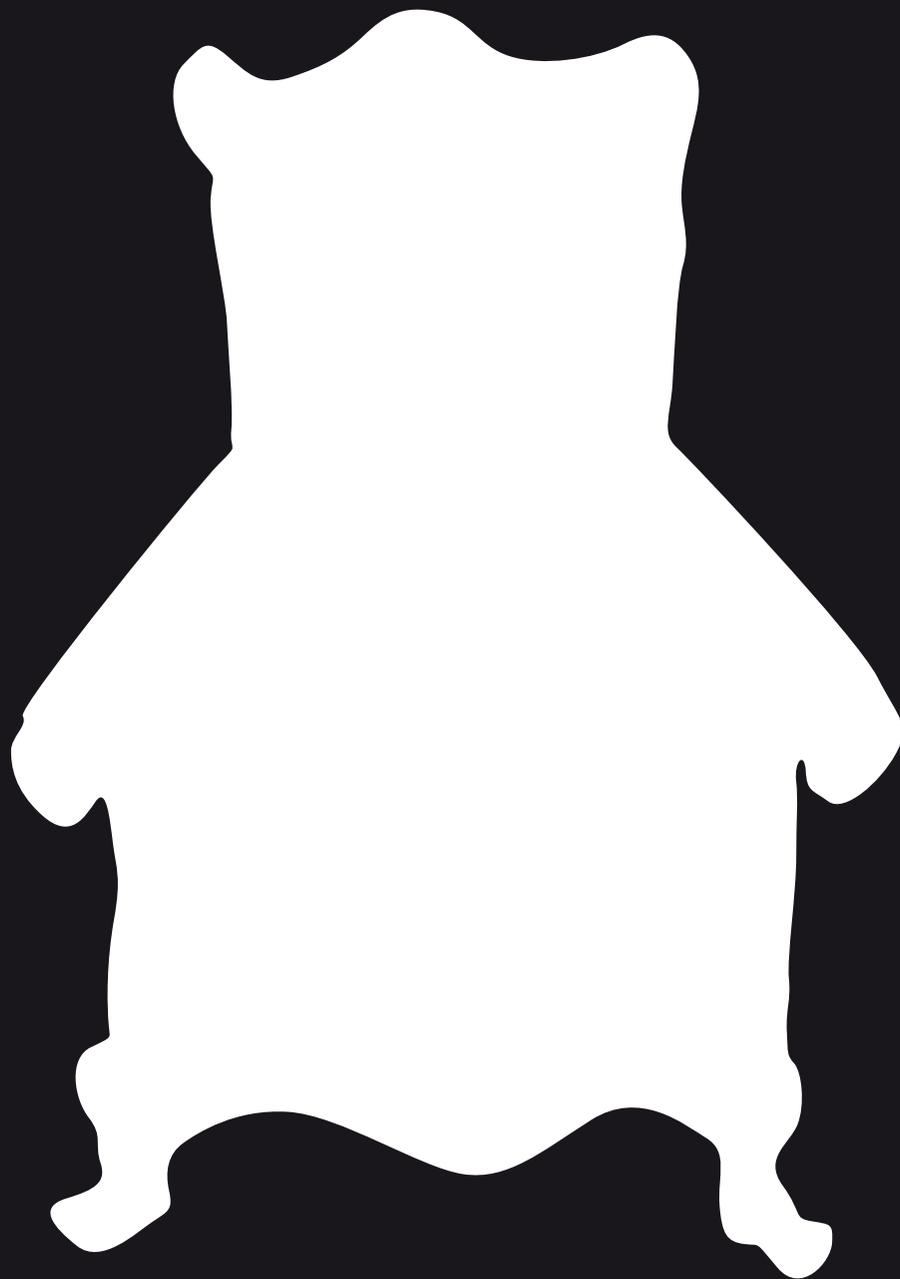
- 1st July 05 to 30th June 06 = 461
- July 06 to June 07= 407
- July 07 to 31st December 07 = 242

In line with the experience at other centres, Mornington Community Information and Support Centre has identified an increase between July 07 and December 07 in the number of people seeking assistance with housing.

Although it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the demand for housing on the Peninsula, anecdotal evidence from local workers suggests that demand for housing is on the increase and that their ability to meet this demand is diminishing. The coordinator of Fusion Youth Housing Service noted the following demand for assistance in February 2008:

*“For instance, over just two days earlier this month we received 26 requests for accommodation none of which we were able to offer a bed, and so we provided them with information and a referral to another accommodation service. These other accommodation services are, however, out of the local area, hence potentially removing young people from their support networks and all that is familiar to them.”*

(Centre Coordinator, Youth and Community Organisation, Community Consultation 2007)







## PART 2 **BEING HOMELESS**

*"I would sit up in the main street  
on a brick wall staring at the  
public phones, wondering where  
am I going to live?" Stella  
(Community Consultation 2007)*

# Peninsula People

The main source of information for understanding homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula comes from people who are homeless and their advocates. This is what they had to say.

## **HOMELESS LIVING - Stella (Community Consultation 2007)**

I'm an older woman, I'll be 70 next year and I've been living on the Peninsula for a long time now. Must be somewhere between 8 -9 years that I have lived in this park. I did work before all the drama, ill health has stopped me working. I share with Jack, who is my four legged friend.

I remember the first time I experienced homelessness. I had just arrived in Hastings. Luckily for me at the time I was helped out by some good people, and Jack and I moved into this cabin.

"I would sit up in the main street on a brick wall staring at the public phones, wondering where am I going to live, what am I going to do, there wasn't even anyone that I could ring up and say, what do I do? Where do I go? And it was just, I am so lucky that I rang the phone number, a friend had told me that the cabin I am in was up for sale, and I got the phone number, I will enquire about it for when I get my yacht back. I might be able to buy it, and I rang that number, and the people who owned it, lived in a house just up the road, have saved my life. Just through that one phone number, those people on many occasions have saved my life. And they let me rent this cabin until I could buy it, they didn't ask any questions, they just met up the street after I had hung up the phone and sat down on this brick wall

with me and I was devastated and I was in tears and I said I don't know where I am going to go, and they just took me under their wing and said that I could rent the place until, and if I want to buy it at the end of it all when it was resolved I was told I could, and I did. As soon as I moved into it I fell in love with it, and thought this is where I will be for the rest of my days, put myself into it and then it wasn't to be."

Yes I thought that this would be my last stop, that I would stay here forever. The Peninsula is very special to me, its part of me now. I own my own cabin in the park, however, that doesn't count for much. Not only have I put up with a lot of abuse but also I have been evicted from my home:

*"The previous owners of the caravan park didn't like me, threatened me, abused me, every other imaginable thing, but I didn't go, until they took me to court and gave me an eviction notice, 90 days, and I owned the house. Eventually I did a number of court (tribunal) appearances; the tribunal ruled that I could stay in until it was sold. I have trouble selling it with these particular owners, but now the park has been sold. The new owners at first insisted that I sell, I have guaranteed them that I don't want to stay, not after all the abuse that I have scored here, so I am still selling."*

It's a hard way to live, never being secure, I feel like I live under the constant threat of homelessness. It's not doing my health any good:

*"I'll be 70 next year. And I don't need this. Although now it has happened and I have set my mind to selling my unit, my cabin, I'm looking forward to moving on. I don't know where to, I have no idea where I am going or what I am going to do, but I'm looking forward to moving on. I will soon go through the money I get for this because I will have to pay high rents for units etc and then I don't know what will happen but I have lost my security by having to sell, but yet I am looking forward to moving on, even at my age, even though I didn't think...I thought this was it."*

## Mark

### (Community Consultation 2007)

I'm in my early to mid thirties. At the moment I'm single although I am a dad and have regular contact with my kids. I have a young daughter that I adore. I am an artist – a painter. I have a number of health issues including drug use. I am getting support with my health. My housing is insecure. I have lived on the Peninsula for about 10 years, I have friends and people that I know I can count on.

My ideal home would be on top of a mountain, a fortress on top of a mountain and animals, but the Peninsula "...it's a slice of heaven." At the moment I am sharing with a friend. I describe my current housing situation as tenuous in every way:

*"I'm looking at either getting a caravan or something for the interim period until I can get a bond or loan, or a housing place or something. It's only a transitional set up that I have got at the moment which is more permanent than where I was, well no, I was living in a squat."*

The first time I was homeless I was 12. I did get support from relatives but it didn't work out:

*"I was fairly lucky that I had some relatives who were willing to take me on board, until I pissed them off enough that they couldn't deal with me anymore."*

I have lived in squats and on the streets, but never on the beach:

*"No, I wouldn't want all that wind and sand, go to the park or a bus stop and just wait for morning. I was using meth amphetamines at the time so staying awake wasn't a problem. Personally I found it just like back packing and that."*

I remember one time where the squat I was living had some unexpected work done to it:

*"I got boarded up in a house once. That felt like I was being buried alive, that wasn't too pleasant. They came and boarded up the house I was in and it made me feel uncomfortable."*

Mark's health is poor and since the interview his housing has collapsed.



**Jai, Karen, and Max  
(Community Consultation 2007)**

I'm 19 (Jai) and Karen is 16, and Max, the one in the stroller, he is 11 months old. Karen is two months pregnant. We've been together for 3 years. We are currently living in a transitional house which has been organised through the Salvation Army. Before that we were living in a motel. That lasted for 2 weeks, and before that we were staying at my mums. We became homeless when my mum kicked us out:

*"We were staying with my mum, and she basically said that if I didn't call her mum, she would kick us out. So I didn't and she kicked us out at 11 o'clock at night, on a Sunday, no buses. So we rang a friend up and we stayed at his place that night and we went into WAYSS in the morning."*

(WAYSS Ltd. is a community based organisation which provides housing and support services. The majority of services provided by WAYSS are funded or contracted by the Victorian Government's Department of Human Services under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, the Transitional Housing Management Program and the Social Housing Advocacy Support Program.)

Was it my fault, was I an idiot?

*"No, but I think I got myself into the situation, no it's my fault this time because I wouldn't call my mother mum, because she doesn't deserve to be called mum, she's a drug user and alcoholic and all that."*

I (Karen) have lived on the Peninsula nearly all my life, since I was 8 years old. I came with my family but they have since moved on. Jai is different, he moved around a lot. I think he went to about 15 different schools.

It's hard. Jai has been blacklisted and has debts. He says he carried on a bit when he was young. The hardest thing for us is:

*"Having to walk back and forth up down the main street with the baby and keeping him warm...And we are worried about Max being taken off us... We hope to get ourselves out of debt and we have put in for public housing Segment 1."*

**Andrew  
(Community Consultation 2007)**

I'm 63 years old, a single man originally from Scotland. My health is not what it used to be – I suffer with a lot of leg pain and stiffness. I came across (to Australia) as a child with my family – might have been the ten pound scheme - we moved to Tasmania. I still have a couple of sisters living in Tasmania. I spent my 20's in Tassie then I followed my mum over to the mainland after a couple years. I spent a bit of time inside, but that was a long time ago – 17 years. I have some family and friends around Hastings. I have a niece that lives in Hastings, her mum lives close by and:

*"I stayed for about 3 months but it got too hard, she (my niece) has young children...I usually go up there every few days and do my washing and stuff like that."*

I've been living in my tent now for about 3 months, maybe a bit longer. It's a two man dome tent. I don't have a car. I did live in St Kilda for a while but it didn't suit me, it was pretty bad. I'd rather go back to Tassie if I have too.

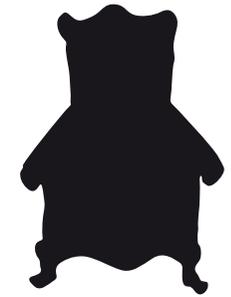
*"I was living in a flat in St Kilda, in housing commission, a block of 36 flats in there - lots of junkies and all that."*

My routine each day is pretty straight forward:

*"Usually, even when I have a place I normally get up at 6 o'clock, and then I drop my stuff off at the caravan park with a friend. (I asked Andrew if he would consider staying in the caravan park – he said he couldn't as it was all cabins now.) Sometimes I go over to West Park - yeah I've got a couple of friends there."*

Hastings is good; I find the people very friendly and easy going:

*"Hastings feels like home – my word yeah... Look I've been camping a few days round here you know where you turn into the football ground, everyone who walked past would say hello how are you and that's it."*



**Colin  
(Community Consultation 2007)**

I'm in my early fifties and I am single.

*"I am a keen photographer, I print them up and send them to family and they are always glad to get them. They are scattered all over the world, so there are different things that they haven't seen."*

I have a university degree. I studied environmental science, although:

*"...it didn't lead to a job and then I got depressed and I have been formally diagnosed now with that, so at least Centrelink leaves me alone a bit, so in those terms my life has improved slightly."*

I have a long connection with the Peninsula, over 20 years now:

*"I first moved to the Peninsula in the late 80's I suppose and apart from going away to do that degree this is where I have been based for most of that time."*

I own a small car which gets me around and I camp. My home is my camping site, in-between camping, I house sit. I have been living like this for the past 12 years now:

*"A few months of house minding and camping somewhere in the National Park or on the foreshore reserve or at a friend's or family property."*

It wasn't always this way, at first I rented on the Peninsula:

*"I used to rent here on the Peninsula before that, in the days when there still was affordable accommodation. Now I don't even look because I know I can't afford it, even camping is becoming expensive... It's partly economic and it's partly a health thing with me. I'm an ex smoker so I can't stand any exposure to fumes of any sort, and I have had chemical exposure being a nursery worker in the past too, so I am very chemical sensitive. Being in buildings at all isn't good for me, most buildings are toxic, so to be out doors is good for me."*

*"At the moment I have to make my camp every day because if I was to stay in the one spot, then I would be charged and it would be 140 dollars per week, or whatever the going rate is now - so this is the deal they don't charge me if I don't stay there, but it means I have to set up every day and pack up the camp in the morning early - so that's unsettling as well. I tend to do my chores or things that I have to do in the morning and then in the afternoon I'll have some time to walk or swim or read or whatever and that's how it goes. It's different when I am house minding - then my day revolves around looking after the house, minding the pets, a bit of gardening, because I have a background in gardening so that's what I do in that situation. But at the moment I am in-between places."*

Am I homeless? I'm not sure, some people would consider me to be homeless but to me:

*"It is the only alternative. It's the best I can manage under the circumstances I think that I would have to put it that way."*

There are many challenges of living this way. There's a lot of stress:

*"On the one hand you have police who may hassle you and you think they will even if they are not going to, rangers, just general local busybodies. And on the other hand, at the other end of the spectrum, there is drunks, hoons and crims that you meet, or even are exposed to because you are out there without a roof over your head, so that can make it very stressful."*

But there is also an upside:

*"But there is a positive side to it as well in that as long as I am not paying rent, I do have more money, so I can survive better on what I do have. I don't have the worries of leases or the kind of things that happen when you are sharing with people, so as far as that goes it's simplified my life which actually helps me because everything goes faster and faster and gets more complex, but I find as I get older I can't cope with that anymore. More and more I am drawn back to nature so*

*even if there were a place to go I would think twice about it because it would depend what it was like, I can't imagine myself in a homeless shelter, I would only go to one if it was as a last resort."*

Nature is my community:

*"It is really, yes, every evening I go down to the ocean beach, and I will watch the sun set, there are the birds and the surf, the clean air. That's all that keeps me going really."*

(Segment 1 is the 'Recurring Homelessness' segment aimed at assisting those households with a history of homelessness or those at risk of such. The remaining three segments are: the 'Supported Housing' segment aimed at those who have specific accommodation needs due to major/full modification requirements and/or high personal support needs related to a disability or health condition (eg: psychiatric condition, frail aged etc); the 'Special Housing Needs' segment aimed at those households residing in inappropriate housing (eg: overcrowding, family reunification, serious medical problems etc) and lastly, the 'Wait Turn' segment for low income earners. (Department of Human Services: Recurring Homelessness Guidelines, Office of Housing, Updated 2002, see [www.dhs.vic.gov.au](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au))

# Workers – People they know

Workers across the Peninsula have contact with people who are homeless. For some it's an ongoing relationship, for others, it's a one-off meeting. These are some of the people they've met and the issues they work on.

## The People We Support

*"Some of them have mental health issues, some of them have addiction issues, some of them have both. Some of them have quite a history of homelessness, because mental health issues and paranoia make them feel unsafe. They experience a financial, gradual reduction of lifestyle. Some don't have any id to get a flat.*

*The majority of my clients who have had insecure housing, most of them have had jobs, paid taxes etc and lived the average life until something has caught them unawares. Often marriage breakdown and then the whole thing snowballs. The mental health issues seem to come afterwards, they get into a situation that they can't get out of, so the depression follows, the heavy drinking, the smoking.*

*Well we do see a lot of blokes, because women and children who become homeless usually become homeless because of family violence and they will end up in a family violence support service and they will get housed through that service eventually. But the single male is what we tend to see more in our programs because the opportunities or the program support for people like them are more hidden."*  
(Community Drug and Alcohol Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

*"Winter is the hardest time – summer people will camp on the foreshore, you can pick up a tent for about \$20. Winter it's harder, the camping dries up, you can only camp at Capel Sound and this has just opened up. We see more people who are more stressed. If you go down to Capel Sound I expect you'll find after Easter that the campers left are transient/homeless people rather than holiday-makers. Then at the end of April they close down the camping area and they come in looking for housing."*  
(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

*"I see this a lot - people living at other people's houses, units, flats. They are not living down the beach, but they are living in situations that they have to deal with; they are being compromised all the time. They are having to, you know - sleep on the couch, sleep on the floor - that sort of stuff. There is no sense of ownership of the house, they might be asked to do a lot of stuff around the house, which wouldn't reasonably be asked, they are made to feel, you know, that they owe the person who is letting them stay there quite a bit and sometimes that is done in sexual favours, sometimes that is done in a whole range of*

*criminal activities as well, helping them sell dope that sort of stuff, so homelessness is so broad and when you look at it there are so many different types of homelessness."*  
(Community Drug and Alcohol Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

*"I have many stories of people who are in situations where they are, I suppose, fighting tooth and nail to keep a roof over their heads. In some circumstances they are living out of a car or out of a tent. I've had one case in Rye where a chap was living in his car for several weeks - he had been kicked out of the house he was living in. He was a local, he had lived in Rye, and he pretty much had a garbage bag of clothes, a pillow and a doona. He was in an old car which I don't believe was registered and he was pretty much pulling up at the foreshore opposite the shops there and parking in a car park, sleeping every night until the residents got a bit concerned for their safety and wanted to know what was going on. So I had to have a chat to the chap and he explained his situation and I explained to him that legally he wasn't allowed to do that on the foreshore and he had to look for alternative spots to park."*  
(Local Worker, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

*"... so we had everyone at peak season and everyone came (campers) then everyone left, and then a bit later on a few people came. We are thinking 'yep okay' they talked about rent assistance; they wanted to stay longer term, but just pay week by week. Then they start talking and they tell us they are homeless and need somewhere to stay. A lot of the time they have agencies looking out for them - looking for accommodation for them. We had one guy last season who started off telling us he was building a house and then as he got more comfortable with us he told us that no he has nowhere to go and again, its taken months and they will be here for months."*  
(MPS Camping Coordinator, Community Consultation 2007)

*"There was an aunty, but he just had nowhere else to go and he joined in with us a few times, different activities that we were doing and we tried to link him in to Ngwala..."*  
(MPS Aboriginal Support and Development Team, Mornington, Community Consultation 2008)

(Ngwala Willumbong (Pitjantjatjara for 'Dry Place') Co-operative Ltd has been a key service provider offering specialist alcohol and drug residential rehabilitation and outreach support services to the Aboriginal communities of Victoria since 1975. Ngwala has developed and will continue to develop appropriate alliances and partnerships with specialist alcohol and drug agencies to foster best practice in service delivery, see [www.ngwala.org.au](http://www.ngwala.org.au).)

*"He was getting some home care or help through Peninsula Community Health Service (PCHS) at one stage, but that was just for a while as well. There isn't anything much out there for men. We have got another two at the moment that we are involved with who are in the same situation. Anyway he ended up getting sick and he went into hospital and probably after 12 months or even 18 months he was living like this and apparently he was picking up really well and he decided to sign himself out of hospital, discharged himself and then they found him in a park in St Kilda, he overdosed or did something."*  
(MPS Aboriginal Support and Development Team, Mornington, Community Consultation 2008)

### **Domestic Violence**

*"A woman of 43, with 5 kids had been in an abusive relationship for 10 years, punched up at home, 2 months ago the police removed the husband, she was left on one income, and she works at the hospital with 5 kids to support. The husband had also committed himself to outrageous personal loans – redrawing against the house. Even though she is bringing home about \$1800 a fortnight she can't meet her commitments- the home, the loans and the 5 kids – she would need \$3000 to meet her expenses. One thing goes wrong and she is at high risk of homelessness."*

(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

*"A lot of women don't identify homelessness; it's often identified through the case plan. Women may not identify housing risk until you work through the case plan with them, when they see what they are up against; the court and property settlements, accessing government housing or accessing bond assistance. Unless women actually have their name on a property title, they effectively have no control. Because women may already be in controlling relationships, they don't immediately identify the risk."*

(Program Manager and Domestic Violence Case Worker, Mornington Peninsula Domestic Violence Service, program of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, Community Consultation 2007)



## Young People

*"A young man of 18 or 19 sleeping at the pier in a tent – he was picked up and moved on by the police every couple of days, they brought him in here. He wanted us to put him up in a hotel – he wanted what he wanted – he didn't, wasn't going to go to a crisis centre – he had a right. He also had mental health issues."*

(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

*"I think it's my observation that the homeless are getting younger as time goes by. When I first got involved 6, 7 or 8 years ago we had a few elderly, mostly, I would say, elderly people. I'm thinking of little D, who slept in the boat shed, various boat sheds and people like him. But now, in later years, there are more younger people."*

(Volunteer Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

*"We had a young woman who came from Frankston last year, she came with her 2 daughters, her husband had just kicked her out. That was a temporary thing, she just didn't know what to do, she came down here and she went to social services and they sent her to Vinnie's Kitchen. She had hardly any money, she didn't have any money actually and they found somewhere for her to live and she wanted to get a job, get some money and to move on. Well she came for about 6 weeks and the last*

*time she came in she said to me I have got a job and I have enough money to be able to pay rent and she said thank you very much...that we helped out in that time that she needed to be helped. She was a lovely person. I think if we can help them climb the ladder that's terrific."*

(Volunteer Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

*"He (young man) was a psyche patient, he needed ongoing help – definite psyche issues – the system let him down badly long term. He had coping skills and mechanisms – he had scenarios he would use, for example he wanted food, he wanted what he wanted. You could see he was one of the long term homeless people – still wandering. The fear is that this is a kid who would top himself, walk off the pier – there was no service I could offer except to be with him."*

(MPS Youth Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

*"We worked with a young woman who was self harming, cutting herself - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were involved. She had experienced ongoing conflict with her mother. She had been sexually abused by her mother's previous partner. She kept running away. The Department of Human Services (DHS) was involved a while ago and they put her in foster care for a while but she didn't*

*like it. She continued to run away from home. Then she met a young bloke, he is 20 and she is 15, she ended up living with him – in a dump in Rosebud. I think they lived in a tent in the backyard for a while. There were a few kids living there, and in another unit. They swap between friends, depending on who's getting along with whom. Drugs and alcohol are used in the house. She stayed for a few months and she had minimal contact with her mum.*

Then they both moved in with his cousin because he had work – then back to the tent when the work ran out. They got a room in the house this time. The boyfriend got kicked out of the house then they lived in his car for a couple of weeks because she wouldn't consider going anywhere without him – very resistant to anyone

getting involved, because of the DHS (foster care) experience. DHS referred her to us and we have been working with her over the past 18 months. And then a couple of weeks ago the boyfriend broke up with her – she was devastated then she went to live with her stepdad who lives in a caravan park, that didn't work out.

*There is some possibility of getting in contact with another relative. DHS have tried to catch up with her, but she won't have anything to do with them. She has got some information about an abandoned house, but she doesn't want to go alone. She hasn't been to school but has completed the Xpress program."*

(Youth Worker, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

## Older People

*“He was early 50’s I’d say maybe mid 50’s. He was clean shaven he wasn’t rough or anything like that, he didn’t smell, he wasn’t dirty, so I don’t think that he was too much of a drunk or anything like that. He definitely by his body language and stuff like that - you could tell he was desperate though, because when I told him he wasn’t allowed to park there he appeared very down and said ‘well where do you want me to sleep then? – I don’t have any alternatives.’”*

(Local Worker, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

What these stories tell us is that homelessness is very much part of the Peninsula community, and that there is no archetypal homeless person.

Peninsula people experience homelessness in a myriad of ways:

- If you’re indigenous, you might find yourself sharing a house with a number of families and experiencing overcrowding;
- If you have an intellectual disability you might find yourself living at home with ageing parents in their 80’s;
- If you’re a person with a mental illness you might find yourself living in a tent on the foreshore;
- You could be in a car with your family, sleeping on a friend’s couch, living in special accommodation;
- You might find yourself living in a dangerous situation with a violent partner;
- You might find yourself living in a caravan with an eviction notice hanging over you;
- You might be squatting in a factory;
- You might be living with your children in sub standard housing; or
- You might be sleeping in a bus shelter.

Local workers identified a range of people using their services who were experiencing homelessness or who were at risk of homelessness. They included indigenous and non indigenous people, young people, single men, older single men, older people, people with mental health issues, people with drug and alcohol issues, people leaving prison, women and children leaving violent partners and people with disabilities. Workers identified people with mental health issues and single men as being two of the most difficult groups to find appropriate housing for.

Homeless people are children, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, the young, the elderly, people with health issues, people facing personal crises, people living in caravan parks, people with children with disabilities, to name a few. In short, people like us. How they experience homelessness and the duration of their homelessness will, in part, be determined by their pathway into homelessness:

*“The research indicates that people on each pathway respond to the experience of homelessness differently and that this has implications for the amount of time they spend in homeless populations. People on substance use and youth pathways commonly describe themselves as ‘homeless’, focus on the here and now, use the welfare service system, are very mobile and, over time, may start to sleep rough. Their embrace of the homeless subculture commonly ‘locks’ them into the homeless population for long periods of time. In contrast, people on the domestic violence and housing crisis pathway do not identify themselves as homeless and resist involvement with other homeless people. These homeless careers tend to be shorter. Then there are those who enter homelessness on the mental health pathway. They are frequently exploited in the early stages of their homeless careers and most sought to avoid exploitation by isolating themselves which then increased their marginalisation.”*

(Johnson, Guy: On the Move: A Longitudinal Study of the Housing Stability of the Homeless in Victoria, RMIT University, July 2006)





PART 3

# HOW IT MAKES YOU FEEL

*"I think it's becoming more prevalent that people are out there with no supports, their health care is atrocious, they are ending up in hospital, they are just getting discharged because they are deemed difficult or whatever, they have got no fixed address."*

(Community Drug and Alcohol Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

# Health and Well Being

The Mornington Peninsula Shire's Health and Well Being Plan identifies 5 community health and well being values as being central to creating "a positive community environment that promotes and fosters a sense of community well being and a safe and healthy lifestyle for people of the Shire."

(Mornington Peninsula Shire: Health, Hope and Happiness, Resource Document 2003)

Together they form a useful construct against which to understand the consequences of homelessness. The values are:

## Healthy places and spaces

Quality natural and built environments that contribute to good health and community well being

## Healthy lifestyle choices

Individual and community responsibility that encourages healthy living

## Quality of life for all

Fair and just access to community resources and empowerment

## Active local communities

Creation of and support for opportunities and involvement in community life

## Sense of hope and belonging

Community well being and confidence through meaningful connection to community place, experiencing hope and happiness.  
(Mornington Peninsula Shire: Health, Hope and Happiness, Resource Document 2003)

## HOMELESSNESS - HEALTH & WELL BEING

### Healthy Places & Spaces

The Mornington Peninsula Shire is known for its stunning natural environment with approximately 193 kilometres of coastline, national parks, and rolling green hinterland. The Peninsula attracts both holiday makers and those looking for a 'better' lifestyle. For the homeless this picture postcard perspective is a galaxy away from their reality of inappropriate, insecure and, in many instances, hazardous accommodation. People can find themselves living in sub standard housing:

*"A young family I know just in the last 18 months. For 2 years they were living in – well it could have been a converted chook pen for all I know – it was a shed out the back of a house that had these kind of little tumbled down bits added to it, it was very jerry built and you know the power and the water were pretty dicey."*  
(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

Colin described a series of rented houses that were in appalling condition. He believed they were partly to blame for his current compromised health:

*"...even when I used to rent years ago it was very bad for my health, I was in one place that had been treated with arsenic so this is possibly a factor in the bad health that I now have, having lived in these places at all."*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

When housing is inappropriate and doesn't meet the needs of its occupants the consequences can be extremely challenging.

*"An elderly resident of a local caravan park loves where she lives, she likes the community feel of the park and has very supportive neighbors. Over the last 6 months her health has deteriorated, she has had major surgery for cancer and when the recent storms hit, her caravan roof lifted and the rain poured in. As her van has no toilet/shower built in she is finding it increasingly difficult to get to the toilet block especially at night. This case highlights how this type of housing which has been good for many years is clearly now inappropriate for this resident."*  
(Community Health Workers, Community Consultation 2007)

Overcrowding is another form of homelessness. Indigenous workers commented that many families were sharing their homes, accommodating homeless family and friends:

*"He had been living in a house...which was very overcrowded. In a two bedroom unit there was anything up to 10 people in the house all at the one time. But that was just the way that they did it, anyone who came from Gippsland they put them up for the night. He was living there for a while, and he was really frail and they had kids or something as well, he was getting to the stage where he couldn't handle all the kids and everything around him so he started just living on someone else's couch."*  
(MPS Aboriginal Support and Development Team, Community Consultation 2008)

Local Indigenous workers identified overcrowding as a significant health issue:

*"The consequences of overcrowding, a lot of health issues for people, you can get 15 people living in a three*

*bedroom house, might get family conflict or other mental health issues.”*

(Indigenous Housing Worker,  
Community Consultation 2007)

Homeless people are also living in tents, cars or sleeping wherever they can:

*“I know of two cases and I know of a couple more when we had a youth worker here – so it’s certainly not a daily occurrence but something that people have made a decision about because they have had absolutely no other choice. I do remember a guy living in a car with 3 kids, come to think of it we have had a couple of those – before they have been able to get accommodation and sometimes they have been able to get it by cobbling stuff together...”*

(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula,  
Community Consultation 2007)

Commenting on the suitability of camping as an ongoing housing option a local worker made the following observation:

*“I think its crap – it’s demoralising, it’s not home, it’s not a house, it’s like being shoved in a paddock. Really, look it’s almost maybe okay for them, they have got their hot showers, they have got their toilets sorted, they have a laundry if you want it – umm certainly from a social perspective it’s nothing.”*

(MPS Camping Co-ordinator,  
Community Consultation 2007)

Mark described his sleeping arrangements which have included squatting, sharing a house and sleeping rough:

*“Sleeping on park benches, if it was raining I would buy a pizza, put the pizza box over my head, keep the rain off my head, I had sleeping bags and stuff.”*

(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

Even though we might anticipate that homelessness would kibosh any notion of healthy spaces and places, all of the homeless people interviewed talked about the beauty of the Peninsula’s natural environment and the pleasure it brought them.



### Healthy Lifestyle Choices

*“Being homeless is expensive, you can’t prepare meals, so you buy takeaway, you can’t store a carton of milk, so you either drink it all or throw it away.”*

(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

Homeless people talked about restricted access to the very basic amenities of life – food and water. People’s food choices are limited by their incomes and lack of preparation and storage facilities. Commenting on the link between food of low nutritional value and inappropriate housing Andrew Ross writing on health equity believed:

*“People living in rooming houses or other poor quality and transient accommodation don’t have adequate food storage or cooking facilities – poor quality nutrition, decreases in health and well being – speaking to the layers of disadvantage.”*

(Ross, Andrew: The New Frontline of Health, Equity for Health: What Role for Local Government, VicHealth Newsletter, Issue 27, Winter 2006)

Access to nutritional food is an ongoing issue for homeless people. Vinnie’s Kitchen, a local volunteer organisation provides cooked meals for those in need. They estimate that they provided meals for on average 15 to 24 people each Monday night.

Mark talked about eating less and relying very much on charities to support him with food. For Andrew setting up camp each night and packing up each morning determined what he could store, prepare and eat. As expected his diet was very limited. In his 60’s his diet mainly consisted of:

*“Many tins, tin stuffs... Well I know I’m not eating properly, nowhere near eating properly. No I don’t have a billy. Sometimes I cook sausages on the barbeques around the place.”*

(Andrew, Community Consultation 2007)

A local worker commented on a similar situation involving a bloke sleeping in his car on the foreshore:

*“Well I’ve never seen an overweight person, technically what that means to me is they are living off rations. I’ve never seen anyone with a nice bottle of Jim Beam or anything like that in their possession. It’s all pretty basic. Normally you see a lot of tinned spaghetti, a loaf of bread, pretty much your basic food, maybe even that’s given to them. I don’t know.”*

(Local Worker, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

Colin, also a camper, who was packing up and moving each night, was able to manage his food more successfully:

*“Yeah I do alright and I have a gas stove so I do eat reasonably well but not as well as I should I suppose – but I don’t live on junk food – I don’t drink and I don’t smoke so I’m pretty right with that. I am sure that there are people out there that are not. If you front up to that Community House they will help you with food vouchers but only if you have a Victorian health care card, and mine is NSW, so in theory they can turn you way. They don’t if you produce a letter from Centrelink which has an address here.”*

(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Not having facilities to store or cook adds to the costs of being homeless. Homelessness is expensive.

Workers commented on the practice of people paying rent rather than buying food or medication:

*“In many instances, when it comes to aged people they would rather pay their rent debt before they pay for medication. It’s the same with food they pay rent and skimp on food which in turn affects their health.”*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

*“So for a person who is chronically ill, isn’t receiving adequate nutrition and not receiving medication, their physical health will be impacted upon. To the point that they will start presenting through the emergency services, ambulance– and so it goes on in this revolving door.”*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

*“We tend to see people like that all the time who become mentally and physically, emotionally and financially sicker because of the lack of shelter.”*

(Community Health Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

In some instances, the necessity to choose between rent, food and medication resulted in a person going from having a home to becoming homeless:

*“And it can start off as simple as someone with a mental health problem: they are taking their medication, their money runs out, they stop taking their medication, they can’t afford it, then a week goes by, then 2 weeks go by and suddenly their mental health has blown right out and is starting to affect their housing and everything, every social aspect of their whole life and that can happen within a couple of months. They can go from housing to homelessness.”*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

Healthy lifestyle choices for many homeless people are tenuous at best:

*“The health stuff is really difficult and can deteriorate. They can’t afford to go to a doctor for a cold or the flu and then it can turn into pneumonia, or teeth issues as well, you can have a whole range of things happening, all the things that people take for granted. They can’t even afford to go to the doctor because there are no bulk billing doctors. And they become quite ill, very ill - cuts or infections on their legs. We have had to pay for people to go to the doctor just to get a tetanus shot or to go to the hospital.”*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

Colin noted that even simple things like having a shower became difficult:

*“It keeps getting busier, and it keeps getting more locked up which is making life harder for homeless people. There used to be a shower that was always run at Sorrento but now that is switched off in the winter, and if you are here out of the season, life gets harder because everywhere it’s just locked up. The foreshore reserves, there were other places you could camp but one by one they have been locked up because hoons get in and trash them and you just can’t use them anymore, same with the National Park.”*

(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Both the climate and the seasons influenced quality of life for people sleeping in tents and the like. With the warmer weather comes the opportunity for some people to camp along the foreshore, although campers were often moved along during the peak school holiday periods. Outside of the season the camping on the foreshore and the associated amenities blocks close down with the exception of Capel Sound in Rosebud West. As part of its management plan Capel Sound is intending to stay open all year. Campers at Capel Sound can stay a maximum of 28 days; they must then leave the foreshore camping area for a week before they can return. While this extension to the service is to meet a need for year round foreshore tourist accommodation, there have been families camping there described by the manager as:

*“...families in transit...families trying to find a rental property.”*

(Manager, Capel Sound Foreshore, Community Consultation 2008)

Reflecting on their circumstances he said;

*“I don’t know where do they go? It’s a big issue.”*

(Manager, Capel Sound Foreshore, Community Consultation 2008)

People sleeping outside also spoke about the lack of access to the amenities blocks throughout the year which close with the closing of the foreshore camping areas. Some campers (homeless) also noted that the charges for camping along the foreshore even when it was available are too expensive. An unpowered tent site costs \$20 per night. Those unable to meet these costs are left with very limited access to public bathing and toilet facilities.

While summer provided some respite for the homeless on the Peninsula, winter was far more difficult to manage. One worker described summers on the Peninsula as providing:

*“...an alternative housing opportunity that’s alive and well. I think in summer, for some reason, for good reasons, people cope a lot better with homelessness, they can survive outside for weeks and access showers and stuff like that, and you can blend and all that sort of stuff. During winter it’s becoming increasingly difficult, look, the people we are seeing are dropping off the radar. I can only assume some of them are dying because they have basically got nowhere to live and the cold weather, lack of good nutritional stuff and that type of thing and they might be going into the city, but we are looking at people who are becoming very unwell through their homelessness.”*

(Community Drug and Alcohol Worker, Community Consultation 2007)



For Colin the weather was just one more variable to manage:

*“That makes life hard. Actually, when it rains you have to pack your stuff when it’s wet. In the last storm I didn’t get things dried out for a couple of days then things go to mould which is not healthy. Just at the moment it’s okay.”*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

For Mark, it was about the hassles of everyday life, just trying to do the basics without having a home:

*“...no running water, food is always problematic because common sense dictates that you are not paying rent you will have extra money in your pocket, but that all gets siphoned away if you want to shower, or if you go to someone’s house you have to pay them in some form of currency. And just little things, you don’t have a pantry, well I did, but you can’t really store anything because it’s not permanent and anyone can come in and take it.”*  
(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

One worker commented that in her view the constant need to attend to the most basic requirements of living consumed people and took them away from enjoying the simple pleasures of life:

*“...because when your whole day is focussed around - I hope it doesn’t rain so I can sleep tonight, or if I’m cold or food - when you don’t even get round to appreciating the nice park you are walking through, or your environment or having interactions with people. Putting the energy into that – your well being - I would suggest is pretty low, on a broad scale.”*  
(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

## Active Local Communities

*“If you don’t have access to decent housing you can’t exercise your democratic rights i.e. you need an address to register for voting, to obtain services, to access work, to maintain friendships and connections.”*

(Macaffer, Jenny: Local Government and Housing Advocacy, 2004)

Housing is intrinsic to active community participation. It is a powerful player in determining what we can and cannot do – setting the boundaries of what is and isn’t possible.

Central to any discussion of active community participation is choice. Community participation is premised on the proposition that people participate in community because they want to, it’s active not prescriptive. Homeless people can find themselves acted upon. For the homeless, community participation can often be scripted by their ‘homelessness’, rather than being driven by desire and/or choice. The need to find shelter, food and water, the need to maintain family and friendship links are the issues that put them into contact with numerous community organisations across the Peninsula, not as volunteers but as clients, the needy rather than the needed.

This does not distract from the value and importance of this relationship. People spoke about the importance of the support

they had received both from individuals and organisations. Organisations talked about the positives of providing opportunities for people to participate in community life. The Youth Housing Service pointed out the many benefits that young people gained from being engaged in the broader activities and programs they offered. Their philosophy was very much about providing young people with opportunities, skills and support to be able to actively participate in the community:

*“We don’t just provide a bed, but a safe environment where young people are supported to make significant positive changes to all areas of their life.*

*Fusion believes that young people (in fact all of us) need two fundamental things: purpose and community. So it’s about working with young people to help them find their individual place and purpose within a broader community. It is fundamental to our work that we support young people to develop and strengthen their links with their local community, so that they are part of a broader community network that supports them. This means that when we end our intensive support with young people they are a part of a community that continues to support them and their future development.*

*That’s why community support is so important to the work that we do, it’s not engagement in a program that ultimately means whether or not a young person succeeds but the community links they form and the support from these that will help them through the crises that life presents. And this will ultimately prevent them from re-entering the homelessness cycle and engaging with all the negative behaviours that exist when young people feel isolated from their communities.”*

(Centre Coordinator, Youth and Community Organisation, Community Consultation 2007)

Homelessness in part can determine the ways and means through which people are able to participate in the community. Jai and Karen talked about having to walk up and down the street in the cold with Max in the stroller. Just the sheer amount of time that was required for the homeless to sustain themselves, combined with paltry resources such as limited incomes and reliance on an inadequate public transport system, makes participation difficult. The homeless, contrary to popular mythology which scripts them as lazy, are by necessity busy people – trying to meet the daily requirements of life.

Homeless people move all the time, whether they are campers like Colin and Andrew, who pack up each morning, only to re-establish camp at night, people

sleeping in cars, the couch surfers moving between the homes of family and friends, squatters, or those in insecure and/or substandard housing – these people are in perpetual motion. Local domestic violence workers talked about:

*“...how many moves somebody has had in the past months. Moving around, staying with others, even though women might have a roof somewhere, often they are still homeless.”*

(Program Manager and Domestic Violence Case Worker, Mornington Peninsula Domestic Violence Service, program of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, Community Consultation 2007)

*In another instance a worker commented that one family she knew “...who had 8 children – they moved at least six times in a year.”*  
(Centre Manager {2000 – 2007}, Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, Community Consultation 2007)

While people were in constant motion, there were clear patterns to how people negotiated their moves, and the sort of outcomes they were hoping to achieve. Colin, for example, moved between the Peninsula and the northern NSW coast. This meant he could camp all year round and it also allowed him to maintain his community connections to each of the regions. Others, where possible, moved

### Quality of Life For All

Quality of life is about fair and just access to community resources and a sense of empowerment. Homelessness denies people access to a fundamental community resource – housing. This lack of housing substantially disempowers them:

*“Housing, more than any other single factor in social life, divides Australians into the possessors and the dispossessed.”*

(Mendolson, Ronald: The Condition of the People Report, 1900-1975, Shelter Victoria Membership Brochure 1999)

This lack of power translates into a daily grind where even life's basics are a struggle. Like the young couple who approached Vinnie's Kitchen:

*“Some weeks ago there were a couple of teenagers, well they seemed like teenagers to me, we had cakes and things given to us by the bakery and she said ‘Whatever you can give us we will appreciate because we are living on the street.’ And I said ‘have you seen anyone?’ She said ‘it's very hard to find somewhere to live down here.’ We sent them over to Anglicare, because when they came to Vinnie's Kitchen they really didn't have anywhere to sleep that night and they were about 17 or 18.”*

(Local Volunteer, Community Consultation 2007)

Or the family camping on the foreshore with children, a baby of two months,

a three year old and a five year old, who had few resources:

*“They were gorgeous lovely people, maybe minor mental health problems, but not much, they were just beautiful, they were really, really nice people. But just nowhere to go, no job to get any financial stability behind them, so that they can kick it off, I have no idea where they went end of season...off they go.”*

(MPS Camping Co-ordinator, Community Consultation 2007)

Part of understanding what determines a person's quality of life - the choices, challenges and opportunities available to them and their families – is a series of questions about how resources are distributed and shared across the community. Who controls their distribution? Who ultimately benefits from their distribution? Who doesn't? And whether this distribution has anything to do with fairness and justice?

Certainly it is not the homeless who are driving the car. On the contrary their capacity to influence the community is marginal at best. As Mark so succinctly put it, when you're homeless:

*“...you get ultimatums rather than options.”*

(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

For example:

*"If you don't get up at 6.30 you are not going to eat – you can't get to the breakfasts, and you have to listen to (their) music while you are trying to eat – you know – that's an ultimatum, you eat the food you listen."*

(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

Because as Mark puts it, being homeless equates to being powerless:

*"I mean the whole person, the whole self becomes eroded until they become persona non grata basically, and people don't look at them in the street, I think cops ignore them, they feel worthless."*

(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

Those people and/or groups in the community with the greatest economic power, in most instances, have the greatest social power and are most able to influence the division of and access to community resources. Given that the homeless are amongst those in our community with the least economic power it comes as no surprise that they have few opportunities to either access or influence the distribution of community resources. This is neither fair nor just.

Colin was aware that he was under constant public scrutiny, living continually in the public domain. This scrutiny

however did not result in fair and just treatment, rather it left Colin powerless, subject to the will of others, in a situation which he found stressful.

Examples of discrimination speak to the relationship between economic, social and community power and influence. The existing systems and processes, in some instances, seem designed to actively work against the homeless, manufacturing and maintaining systemic discrimination rather than providing assistance. Workers were able to identify processes which actively worked against homeless people seeking assistance, for example:

*"So for me, I'm working with a client and I try to get him into a caravan park or private rental, he doesn't have enough id to get in there, he doesn't have an address, so with Centrelink he can't get his benefits fixed up. You basically have to get him a mobile phone and post box so he looks like he has got an address, fix up his identity and then try and find a real estate agent, let alone the money. I ring up the caravan park and say have you got room for a tenant, no, or its \$200 per week to hire a site to put a tent on. There is prejudice against them. They weed out clients. It's \$185 dollars a week (in the caravan park), it's not sustainable."*

(Community Health Workers, Community Consultation 2007)

Overt examples of discrimination included homeless people being verbally and physically assaulted. Their visibility increased their vulnerability, making them easy targets for this. For the homeless, the combination of mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues and increased visibility had the potential to draw negative responses from other community members:

*"Yeah there was one, and they ended up just throwing cans and bottles at them. And the thing is that they are out there with mental health issues, they might get loud and noisy on their own, and I think there is a fear factor from the general campers - what the hell is going on here?"*

(MPS Camping Co-ordinator, Community Consultation 2007)

However this type of behaviour was not a universal experience, Andrew commented that he had not experienced any discrimination or hassles while camping out in Hastings. He described the friendliness of locals. How the morning walkers would take the time to say hello.

Other less overt examples of discrimination included difficulties that some sections of the community had in accessing private rental. Some organisations talked about people being discriminated against because they are receiving a pension or benefit, others identified particular groups

within the community who struggled to get to first base in the private rental market, in particular young people, indigenous people and people leaving prison.

Finally there exists in our community a 'passive' acceptance that some degree of homelessness while undesirable is part of the way we live together, resulting in a failure to act. This failure to act to change those circumstances and systems that maintain homelessness, allows discrimination to continue. It perpetuates the plight of the homeless - their inability to access community resources, the denial of fair and just treatment and resulting in disempowerment and all its consequences.

## A Sense of Hope and Belonging

*“People’s lives are limited without that connection to their community – belonging.”*

(Centre Manager {2000 – 2007}, Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, Community Consultation 2007)

Belonging and the sense of hope and happiness it brings, is about being connected to your community. Belonging is one of those universal values which we all strive to maintain. While it’s hard to do this if you are homeless, this does not diminish the value of your belonging. Homelessness and belonging are not mutually exclusive. For example, the people who turned up at Vinnie’s Kitchen for a meal valued belonging, their sense of belonging to a community was very important. Sharing a meal and sharing time were just as important as the food – food for the soul:

*“That’s right. I’ve noticed people when they first come, bordering on depression which can be very, very serious and after a while, after coming there a few times, they change, they lose that depression, that’s a great aspect of the place.”*

*I think the thing is that all the clients are welcomed into a warm and friendly atmosphere and that makes a big difference to them, the social contact.*

*Some come in early just for a chat, and some sit in the same seat. Some people*

*don’t want to move out of the area because they are connected here.”*

(Local Volunteer, Community Consultation 2007)

The homeless people interviewed who expressed a strong desire to stay on the Peninsula, identified the Peninsula as their belonging place. Each spoke fondly about living here and identified a myriad ways in which they were connected.

For Jai, Karen and Max, it was about being locals. Karen was brought up on the Peninsula and had gone to the local schools and Jai was connected through his relationship with Karen. Colin’s connection with the Peninsula was over a twenty year period, arriving in the 80’s, he identified as a ‘local’. His sense of belonging is about local friendships and his affinity with the natural environment. His recent stints as a house minder brought him opportunities to make friendships which were ongoing:

*“I go and visit, but not somewhere where I can stay permanently.” As Colin pointed out “...bricks and mortar cannot be a home.”*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Mark has also lived on the Peninsula on and off for the past 10 years. He described it as a “slice of heaven” because “it hasn’t been butchered and concreted.” His young daughter was also close by which was important to him as a parent.

Andrew also had strong ties to the Peninsula, with family and friends in Bittern and Hastings. They help to support him by providing facilities like a place to do washing and a place to store his swag during the day. Andrew, who had previously had an Office of Housing flat in St Kilda which he hated, didn’t want to leave the Peninsula. He was adamant that if he was forced to leave he would return to Tasmania where he still had some family. Even Stella, who has decided to move on, talked about her connections to the local community; having lived in the park for 9 years, she has a very strong sense of place. For Stella, it was all about local friendships, the people that supported her, her job and the friends that she made at the local dog park. These experiences were further substantiated by local workers, who were well aware of people’s desire to stay local.

Homeless people invested considerable energies trying to maintain this sense of place. Staying local often resulted in staying in inappropriate housing – Jai, Karen and Max spent time on a friends couch and in a local motel before they got into transitional housing. Andrew, even with his deteriorating health, had decided to camp around Hastings rather than move on. Colin struggled to find a safe, affordable site to pitch his tent, whilst Mark was relying on the support of a new friend.

Along with a sense of belonging, homeless people expressed hope for the future. These hopes were contextualised within the limitations of their current lifestyles. For Colin hope lay with opportunities to expand his house sitting activities:

*“I am really just surviving from day to day and if I have a house minding in place to look forward to, that’s good but beyond the end of that I don’t usually know what’s going to happen. I have only ever once gone from one place to another - another gap that I fall into. But I have got myself back onto the house minding registrar on the computer, so there is a good chance that I will get another place.”*

*I first started house minding on the Peninsula here and that was with (a family) in Rye, I went there 4 times and looked after their cat while they were away with their children and that’s how I got referred to (another family)– so it’s a small world on the Peninsula.”*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Andrew wanted a room somewhere. For Jai and Karen it was about getting out of debt and not losing custody of Max. Mark and Stella remained more circumspect. Mark commented that:

*“What I might want to do is not necessarily ideal. The ideal is very rarely reached, so I’m looking at getting a*

*caravan somewhere. That in itself is problematic because \$150 a week for a caravan you don't really get much of a chance to save anything. I spent 12 months in one; I spent over 10 grand on rent - that was in Seaford."*

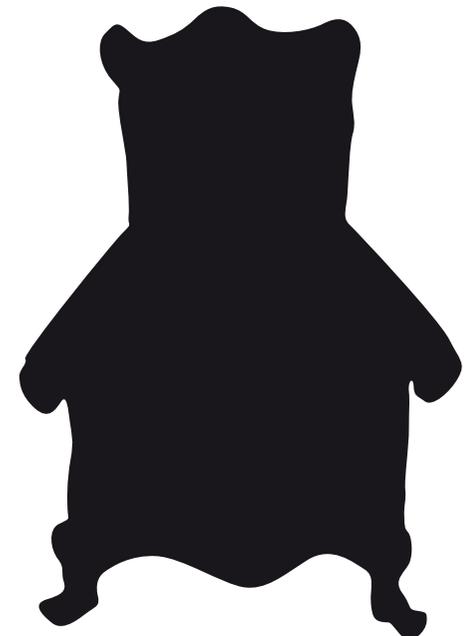
(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

And for Stella the future remained an unknown challenge:

*"... but now I am over that, no idea what's ahead of me, don't know where I'm going, don't know what I am going to be living in, and my money won't last that long, and I don't know what will happen after that. But this is a situation that I have been forced into but I think perhaps I am looking forward now to moving on and finding a new challenge - I don't know."*

(Stella, Community Consultation 2007)

Even though belonging and a sense of hope are important to homeless people, their circumstances, challenges and limited opportunities work against them. Some people believed that they were seen as 'outsiders' that others saw them as being of less value than other community members. This scripted them at best as invisible and at worst as community burdens. It's hard to belong to a community, when you are placed outside its gates.



## HOMELESSNESS MAKES YOU SICK

*“For those with prolonged experiences of homelessness, their life expectancy is 15 to 20 years shorter than for average Australians.”*

(Pearlman, Jonathon: Shame on us, Rudd pleads for homeless, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2008)

*“Being forced to live in the streets and the space of public life can make for a humiliating experience. Not only is health and well being affected by a lack of access to the basics of food, shelter and warmth but a lack of freedom of movement, sense of place and belonging and any feelings of safety and security. People who are homeless face daily barriers and constraints to living a decent life. They are further denied the opportunity to vote, to participate in community, to access services, to get jobs, to receive income, often unable to maintain friendships and connections, and to realise their full potential as human beings.”*

(Macaffer, Jenny: Taking back the commons, Parity Magazine 2006)

Even if you are not living on the streets, homelessness or the threat of homelessness has a huge impact on your health and well being, your family, friends and the broader community. There is no doubt that homelessness or the risk of homelessness makes you sick. It

impacts on your physical, social, emotional and mental health and well being.

In general the people experiencing homelessness and local workers interviewed for this report, commented on the overall ill health of homeless people. In particular, homeless people identified increased stress in their lives as negatively impacting on their health. For Stella, a caravan park resident with an eviction notice hanging over her head, life had become almost unbearable:

*“It was an absolute nightmare. Trying to find where I could go if I had to leave, and there was nowhere because I didn’t have the money for any deposits, and I would have to still keep paying the site fees at the park so that they wouldn’t just take possession of my house. So I didn’t have the finances to pay to live anywhere else, there was nowhere to move my caravan to, and it is too big to move...I could have been moved, but it would have cost me a lot of money and there was nowhere to move to.”*  
(Stella, Community Consultation 2007)

She commented that her health deteriorated considerably as a result of the stress she endured:

*“It was devastating. I was very fit, I had a job I loved and the people at the job loved me. Gradually, I was going down*

*hill, physically and mentally and there was nothing I could do about it – absolutely nothing I could do about it. Until, in the end, last Christmas, I had to give up my job because my physical and mental stability was beyond it, beyond anything really – even to get through a day, existing through a day was hard.*

*I had wonderful friends around me but they couldn’t do anything. Finally I just wasn’t coping anymore. I don’t go visiting my friends any more, very rarely. Yeah it’s had a huge impact, I was extremely healthy and now I’m not.”*  
(Stella, Community Consultation 2007)

Colin also commented on the stress that his lifestyle generated and how this exacerbated existing mental health issues for him. Although he was careful to point out that, in some ways, camping and the solitude that the natural environment brought him was a positive:

*“I actually like solitude. I find it extremely tiring to have to go into town and interact with a lot of different people, not with you specifically, but just the noise and the fumes, so called civilisation doesn’t suit me at all. I always go back to the bush if I can.”*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

For Jai, Karen and Max it was the stress of being homeless, of being kicked

out with a child in the middle of the night and having nowhere to go.

All the workers identified mental health issues as a significant health issue for homeless people. A recent study by the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) on homelessness supported the view that mental health issues could be the result of homelessness:

*“30% of the homeless had mental health issues. However, just over half (53%) developed mental health problems after becoming homeless.”*  
(Chamberlain, Chris; Johnson, Guy & Theobald, Jacqui: Homelessness in Melbourne Confronting the Challenges, Centre for Applied Social Research RMIT University, February 2007)

Local workers also noted a link between drug and alcohol use and homelessness. For example, the local youth accommodation service saw a number of young people who had substance abuse issues. Once again the RMIT findings supported the position that while there is a definite link between drug and alcohol misuse, the majority of homeless people developed problems with substance misuse as a result of their homelessness:

*“There is a link between substance use and homelessness. 43% of this sample had problems with substance*

*use. However, the researchers found that 66% had developed their problems after they had become homeless. Some people do enter the homeless population because of substance use issues, but most people engage in substance use after they have become homeless.”*

(Chamberlain, Chris; Johnson, Guy & Theobald, Jacqui: Homelessness in Melbourne Confronting the Challenges, Centre for Applied Social Research RMIT University, February 2007)

For young people who are homeless and experiencing mental health issues, the situation is dire:

*“Recent research has found 41.9% of surveyed homeless young Australians aged 12 - 20 years had attempted suicide at some time in their lives, and 11.6% had done so recently - 9 within the past 3 months.”*

(Milburn, N; et al: Cross-national variations in behavioural profiles among homeless youth, American Journal of Community Psychology, Vol 37 2006)

Their difficulty in accessing mental health services further compromised their health and well being, leaving them extremely vulnerable:

*“Only one out of four young persons with mental health problems receives professional help.it would be safe to*

*hypothesise that the proportion of homeless young people accessing needed treatment is even less.”*

(O'Brien, M; et al: Improving access to mental health services for young people: The role of headspace, Parity Vol 20(1) 2007)

Inadequate mental health services are an issue for people of all ages. The inability to get access to services and the pressing need for more services was universally endorsed by homeless people and local workers. Colin like many others was unable to get the mental health services he needed:

*“...but as the system is set up at the moment I can't afford to do the therapy that I need and the psychotherapist said we are lobbying the government hard to change this because it isn't meeting the need that is there.”*

(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Local workers also commented that homeless people presenting with mental health and/or substance abuse issues were the most challenging to work with because of the complexity of their issues, their need for ongoing support, and the lack of community resources to support them.

The dearth of community resources resulted in a number of people camping on the foreshore, as a last resort. Life

on the foreshore is harsh for anyone but for people experiencing mental health issues and those around them it can be particularly challenging:

*“We had one, a guy last week; he had probably been here about a month, maybe a month and a half. To start off with, he seemed fine - great. We had a really good chat, he had nowhere to go, but he was okay, he went off and bought his tent and started camping. He stayed for a couple of weeks, progressively he got worse as far as his health goes – well he just, he wasn't communicating as well as what he did to start with, he started getting a bit more aggressive.”*

(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

For Andrew and Jai, homelessness was taking its toll on their physical health. Andrew, a 60 year old, who was camping out in Hastings, said:

*“My body's telling me I've had enough. My leg isn't good – I don't know what it is - like I can walk on it all day and it doesn't bother me, but as soon as I lay down I have pain. I haven't been yet (to the doctors) but I am going to have to.”*

(Andrew, Community Consultation 2007)

The experience of ill health is part of the experience of homelessness. Jai, a

young man of 19, talked about migraines and chest compressions. Workers also commented that some people who were unable to find appropriate accommodation on the Peninsula disappeared or moved on, needed to move on or were forced to move on. While we might not know where they go, we do know that the majority of these people are experiencing ill health and have been dislocated from their networks and communities. This is a very poor and unacceptable health and well being outcome for them, their families, their friends and the workers trying to support them.

## **FAMILIES, FRIENDS AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY**

The impacts of homelessness are not limited to the homeless, but also affect the lives of the people who surround them, their families, friends, the people who work with them and the broader community.

In the first instance homelessness is not just about individuals, it is also about families and children. Approximately:

*“...100,000 people are homeless each night, including 10,000 who are children under the age of 12 and who are forced to sleep outside or in crisis accommodation, boarding houses or with family and friends.”*

(Pearlman, Jonathon: Shame on us, Rudd pleads for homeless, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2008)

Tony Nicholson, the director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence, added that of the 250,000 people who experienced homelessness last year 55,000 were children under the age of 10 who accompanied their parents into crisis accommodation. (Pearlman, Jonathon: Shame on us, Rudd pleads for homeless, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2008)

On the Peninsula families are the emerging homeless. While in previous years families were the exception:

*“Very occasionally the Centre sees families – women with children and it’s usually about domestic violence.”*

(Centre Manager {2000 – 2007}, Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, Community Consultation 2007)

Workers reported seeing an increasing number of families come through their doors. Workers talked about families, like Jai, Karen and Max, moving around the Peninsula, unable to secure ongoing affordable, appropriate or accessible housing. There were also examples of families camping on the foreshore who were homeless.

If you’re the relative or the friend of a person who becomes homeless, their homelessness will affect you. The spin offs for those surrounding homeless people can be significant:

*“You have to consider the bigger picture, people who are homeless cause the disintegration of other relationships, they burn out other family members, not just immediate relationships, but extended ones, through to other family members.”*

(Community Workers, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

Another worker spoke about a person who they were working with whose family insisted that they not be contacted again:

*“Sometimes we ring families, for example, if someone is suicidal, and they will say don’t ring me I don’t want to have anything to do with him – don’t even talk to me, they keep ringing me I can’t cope with it anymore – so they are really on their own.”*

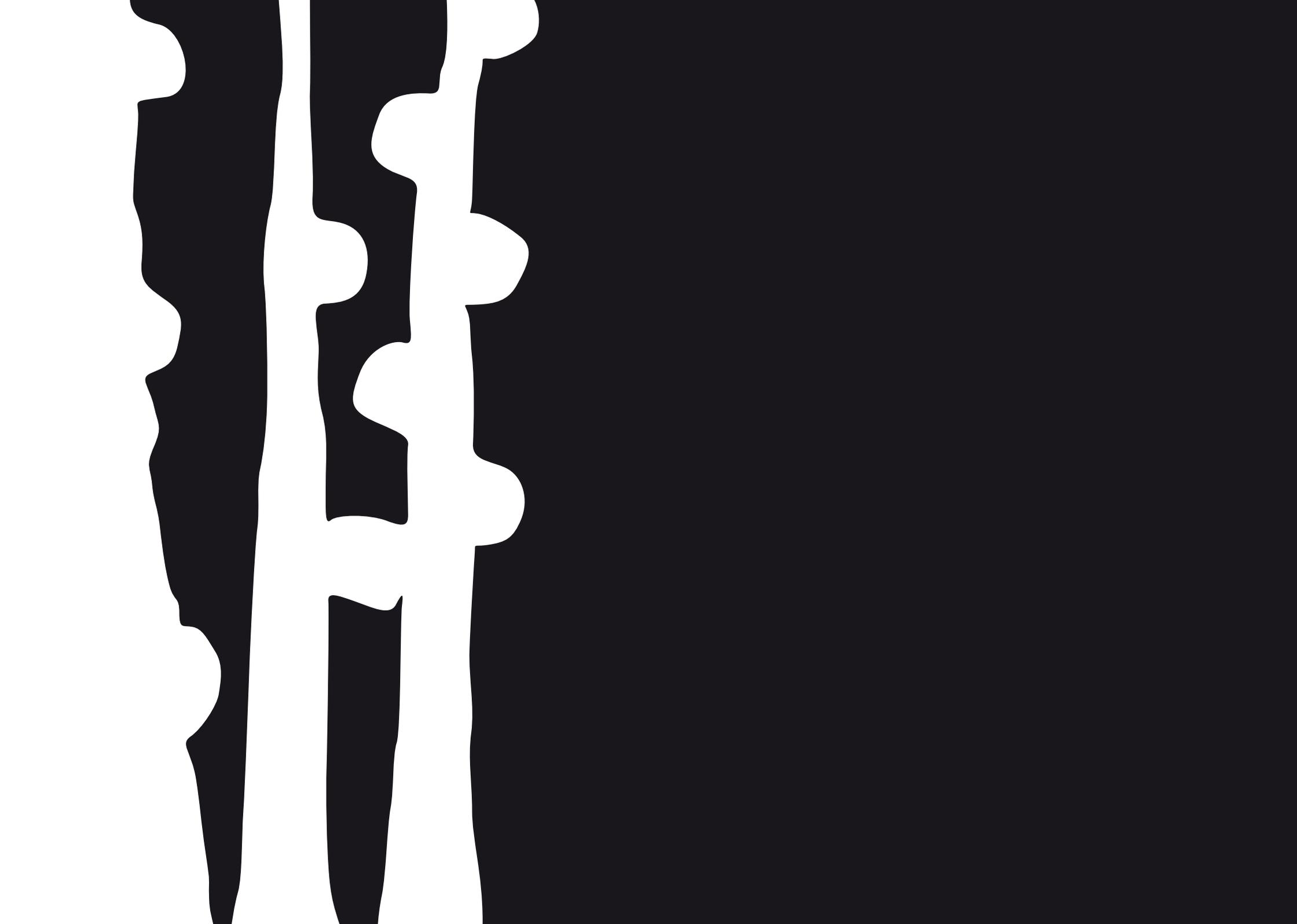
(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

People who work with the homeless face the daily challenge of trying to meet their needs. They are working with people in desperate circumstances with inadequate community resources to meet those needs. Workers talked about cobbling solutions together with other organisations, some identified success stories, and others talked about loss. Workers covered the gamut of emotions from hope, through to anger and frustration.

Homelessness is very much about determining the type of community we want; it’s about what we value as a community. For those who strive for fairness and justice, who value cultural diversity, who advocate for a caring and inclusive community, homelessness is a reminder of the value and importance of working for change and serves as a bleak reminder of the work ahead. Homelessness is a community measure of what we have achieved and how much further we have to travel.

*“The health and integrity of human life, the extent to which we are able to look after people on the margins of our society - in the end they are critical measures of Australia.”*

(Pearlman, Jonathon: Shame on us, Rudd pleads for homeless, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2008)







PART 4

# HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

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(Department of Human Services:  
Rental Report, June Quarter 2007)

# Causes of Homelessness

## THE BIG PICTURE: DIFFICULT LIVES, STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE AND A CRISIS IN COMPASSION

There are two traditional explanations of the causes of homelessness. One identifies structural factors (housing costs, unemployment, low education, poverty)- systemic inequalities, as the main causes of homelessness; and the other, which looks to individual life experiences of loss and trauma as the main causes of homelessness. Structural explanations alone however fail to answer why not all people who experience structural disadvantage become homeless, similarly, not all people who experience trauma become homeless.

Dr Catherine Robinson argues that 'vulnerability' is the bridge between the two explanations:

*"Vulnerability causes homelessness not simply as a context of poverty, isolation, low education levels, unemployment but as a state of being, nakedness to the hurts of the world. That homeless people carry profound wounds, wounds often inflicted in early childhood and re-opened again through adulthood, is usually not explicitly noted in research and policy work aimed at either understanding or responding to homelessness. Vulnerability, and homelessness, then are not simply structural effects but lived experiences in which cumulative trauma and resilience must be seen to play powerful roles in how life paths unfold."*

(Robinson, Catherine (Dr): Responding To Long Term Homelessness: The challenge of qualitative evidence, Keynote Address, 4th National Homelessness Conference, Sydney 2006)

Other researchers have looked at the interplay between the structural and individual determinants of homelessness, using the concept of 'pathways' to explain how people become homeless. They have identified a number of different pathways including mental health, domestic violence, substance use, youth and old age which can lead to homelessness. (Johnson, Guy: On the move: A longitudinal study of housing stability of the homeless in Victoria, RMIT University)

For example, young people can be at risk of homelessness because of: *"...a number of factors such as family conflict, family breakdown."* (Chamberlain, Chris; Johnson, Guy & Theobald, Jacqui: Homelessness in Melbourne Confronting the Challenges, Centre for Applied Social Research RMIT University, February 2007)

And: *"...attitudes toward school, lack of employment opportunities, current and future expectations, and substance use."* (Mission Australia: Homeless young Australians: Issues and responses, Snapshot 2007)

Whereas a recent study of older people in the USA, Australia, and the UK found that:

*"...the majority of participants experienced their first episode of homelessness relatively late in life. The most common immediate antecedents to homelessness among interviewees in Melbourne was housing being sold, converted or needing repair (28%), disputes with the landlord, co-tenants, or neighbours (27%) and difficulties paying rent or mortgage (26%)."*

*Around 40% of respondents reported that gambling problems had been an instrumental factor in their homelessness although it had not been the antecedent cause."* (Brady, Michelle; Cooper, Lesley; Edwards, Donna; Flatau, Paul; Goulding, Dot; Martin, Robyn & Zaretsky, Kaylene: The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of homelessness prevention and assistance programs, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Western Australian Research Centre, September 2006)

Although a lack of housing is only one aspect of homelessness, the lack of affordable, appropriate and available housing is an ongoing and deepening issue for homeless people and the people who work with them. There is an ever increasing library of evidence to suggest that there is something very wrong with the Australian housing system:

*"Over 400,000 households are in 'housing crisis'. They spend more than 50% of their low incomes on housing. This is one in every 20 households."* (Australians for Affordable Housing [www.affordablehousing.net.au](http://www.affordablehousing.net.au) - this campaign ceased February 2008)

Traditionally Australia has had a two tier housing system in which home ownership is seen as the 'norm' and private rental as its poor cousin. Private rental was and is still considered by some as a 'short term' proposition, to be taken up only as an interim measure suitable, for example, for young people saving for a deposit on their own homes. So pervasive is the 'home ownership dream' that long term renters continue to stand firmly outside the norm. In the main, they have been constructed as second class citizens. This exclusion from the mainstream has led to an unfortunate narrowing of public discussion about housing as mostly a discussion about home ownership and affordability - in part neutralising the interests and plight of renters in public consciousness.

Yet the dream of home ownership is dissolving with ongoing rate rises, predictions of up to 300,000 mortgagees at risk of defaulting (Colebatch, Tim: Warning of 10% Hike in Rentals if Rates Rise, The Age, 4 February 2008), and with house prices escalating:

*“Under the combined present circumstances – of historically high housing un-affordability, increased labour market flexibility potentially creating increased uncertainty about future incomes, and the fact that the only existing affordable housing is likely to be located far from the centres of the growth engines of the economy – it is not at all surprising that home ownership rates among the young have declined dramatically...Even if the relationship between house prices and household incomes returns to the levels of the time when the baby boomers entered home ownership, there will be a significant deposit gap that Generation X households will need to bridge before they can access home ownership. On current lending criteria with maximum permissible debt servicing ratios, a household with an income of around \$50,000 (roughly equal to average weekly earnings) could borrow just over \$200,000 (with repayments at close to 40% of its income). On the basis of the June 2005 median house prices in Australia of just under \$350,000, this implies a savings requirement of three times the household's annual income. Median house prices would need to be at least \$100,000 lower for Generation X to have to accumulate no more than the same deposit in relation to income as their parents. Median house prices would need to be more than \$150,000 lower if Generation X (and, following them,*

*Generation Y) are to have the same access to home ownership as their grandparents.”*  
(Yates, Judith: Affordability and access to home ownership: past, present and future? National Research Venture 3: Housing affordability for Lower Income Australians Research Report No. 10, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Sydney Research Centre, November 2007)

The impacts of the ‘affordability crisis’ are increasingly being played out in the rental market. Nearly 50% of people coming into homeless services across Australia are private renters. (St Vincent de Paul Society: Don’t dream it’s over, housing stress in Australia’s private rental market, July 2007). The current rental market offers no relief. Renters are under siege with rental vacancy rates at their lowest levels since records began almost 40 years ago.

The Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) report that:

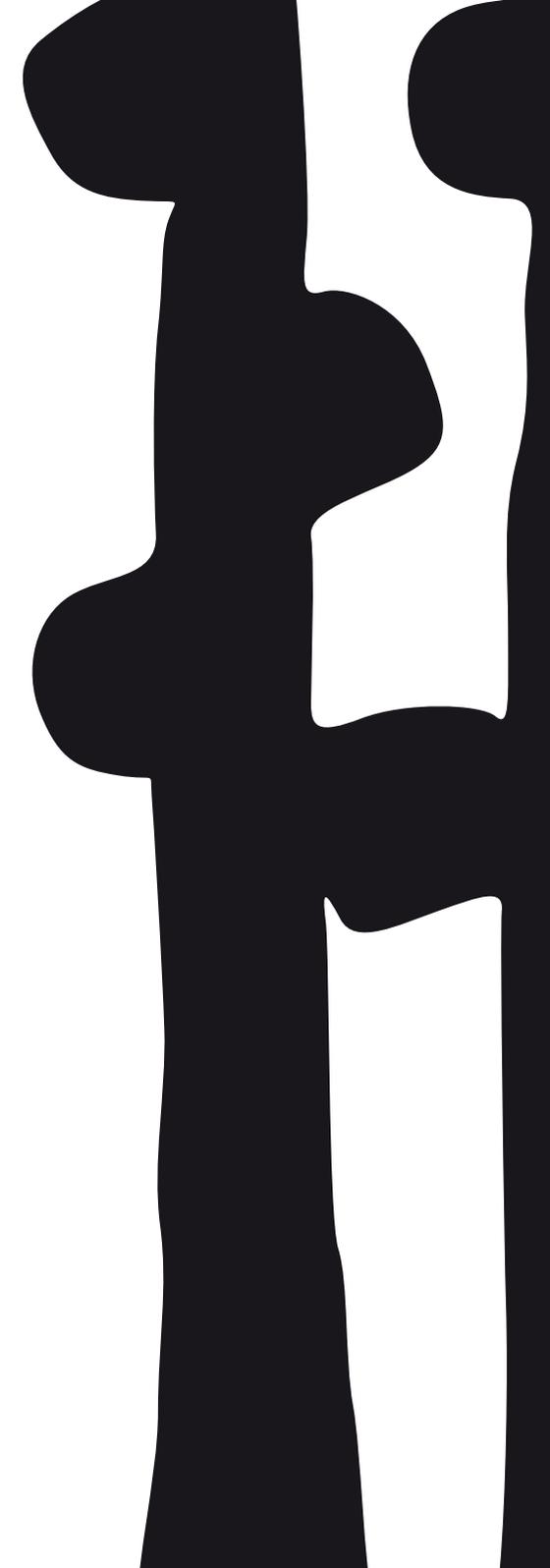
*“In metropolitan Melbourne the median rent for new lettings increased by 6.2% in real terms in the 12 months to the June quarter 2007. This is the highest annual increase in real metropolitan median rents since the March quarter 1998 and overall just 27.5% of new lettings in the June quarter were affordable to lower income households. This represents the lowest proportion of affordable rental*

*accommodation over the eight year period for which this data is available.”*  
(Department of Human Services: Rental Report, June Quarter 2007)

The future looks even bleaker with warnings of a 10% hike in rental rates if interest rates continue to rise. (Colebatch, Tim: Warning of 10% Hike in Rentals if Rates Rise, The Age, 4 February 2008)

The immensity of the problem can be measured by the number of households who are currently experiencing housing stress – spending more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs. Australians for Affordable Housing estimate that:

- *Currently 1.1 million low to middle income households are paying so much in mortgage or rental costs to be living in ‘housing stress’. This is a massive 1 in 7 households struggling with housing costs;*
- *35% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) recipients - families on very low incomes - still spend 30% or more of their incomes on their housing costs; and*
- *357,000 families with children have insufficient money for food, clothing, heating and transport after they have paid for their housing.*  
(Australians for Affordable Housing, [www.affordablehousing.net.au](http://www.affordablehousing.net.au) - this campaign has ceased February 2008)



Similarly a recent report by St Vincent de Paul found that:

*“Private renters comprise only a fifth of all households, but well over half of all the households in housing stress – with a third of those in housing crisis (spending over 50% of their incomes on rental). That’s 345,000 households.”*  
(St Vincent de Paul Society: Don’t dream it’s over, housing stress in Australia’s private rental market, July 2007)

In Victoria, DHS statistics tell a similar story, confirming for the June quarter 2007:

*“Singles receiving the minimum wage would spend 41.2% of their income renting a median priced one bedroom dwelling in the metropolitan area and for couples with two children receiving a minimum wage and Centrelink family payments, renting a metropolitan median priced three bedroom dwelling, the figure is 32.8% of income.”*  
(Department of Human Services: Rental Report, June Quarter 2007)

As St Vincent de Paul reminds us, the consequences of housing stress can be dire:

*“Housing stress does much more than reduce household spending power. It has a significant effect on people’s ability to get a job; it adds stress to relationships, makes it more difficult for children to be educated and, in extreme cases, can lead to homelessness. It also divides our cities and regions into separate enclaves of affluent and poor.”*  
(St Vincent de Paul Society: Don’t dream it’s over, housing stress in Australia’s private rental market, July 2007)

*Nor is there any relief to be found in the public and or community housing sector with long waiting lists and insufficient “...spending on public and community housing (which) means that this form of tenure supports fewer Australian households than ever before.”*  
(Australians for Affordable Housing, www.affordablehousing.net.au - this campaign has ceased February 2008)

In Victoria there are about 37,000 people on the public housing waiting lists. (Cooke, Dewi: Homelessness a cause not a result of drug abuse, The Age, 5 February 2007). Particular groups are overrepresented on waiting lists. For example in Victoria in 2005 there were:

*“...over 1,000 indigenous households on the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (AHBV)/Office of Housing (OoH) waiting list, representing approximately 3% of the total households on the OoH waiting lists (five times the representation of indigenous people in the Victorian population). 23.4% of indigenous households rent in public housing, compared to 3.5% of non-indigenous households.”*  
(Office of the Victorian Government Architect: Which Way? Directions in Indigenous Housing Conference, Royal Australian Institute of Architects 2007)

Similarly for single people there are limited public housing options:

*“There are negligible amounts of public housing available for this group, and only the most resourceful are able to secure private rental. The rest are forced to wait for years until their public housing offer comes up, resulting in repeated moves between slum boarding houses, sleeping on the streets, in cars, or ‘couch surfing’ around ever dwindling social networks.”*  
(Home Ground Services Annual Report 2005/2006)

The failures of the Australian housing system have been recently documented by the Special United Nations Rapporteur on adequate housing. He identified a long list of systemic problems across Australia.

They included:

- The general housing conditions of indigenous peoples;
- Widespread un-affordability creating a very large demand for affordable accommodation and public housing;
- Overcrowding;
- Homelessness;
- Inadequate and ageing public housing stock;
- Stigmatization of people living in public housing;
- Waiting lists for public housing up to 10 years;
- Discrimination in accessing private housing, particularly rental accommodation (in particular for people receiving social benefits, indigenous people, low income households, households with children, women and people with disabilities);
- Lack of emergency and medium-term accommodations, including women’s refuges and transitional housing;

- Lack of planning and interest in state policies for rural areas and their needs;
- Uncoordinated approach to the problem of adequate housing, and the lack of understanding of the various components of this right;
- Lack of secure tenure for tenants in both public and private rental accommodation; and
- Lack of appropriate redress mechanisms.

(Kothari, Miloon: Preliminary Observations, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Mission to Australia, 31 July – 15 August 2006)

For Mark Peel, a Professor of History at Monash University, what underlies this near absolute systemic failure of the Australian housing system to meet community needs is a 'crisis in compassion'. He asks us to consider the more uncomfortable questions about what is acceptable in a just and equitable society:

*“And who is asking the crucial questions about a society in which more of life’s rewards will flow from the competitive struggle for jobs and resources and wealth? What happens to the young for*

*example? Who protects the weak? What are the moral and collective responsibilities of people who are advantaged by talent and skill? What are the obligations of those whose wealth and security accrues largely from luck of inheritance or timing? What do we do with people who aren't very capable, or who aren't even interested in doing the things which we are prepared to do to pay for a decent income, or whose vocation perhaps lies in caring for children or the elderly or being a good parent? Most of all, perhaps, what happens to the losers?*

*These failures of imagination and fairness lie nearer the top than the bottom of Australian society. If there's a crisis, it's not a crisis of welfare dependency or alienation. It's a crisis of compassion. It's a crisis of obligation, from the lucky to the unlucky, the old to the young, the insider to the outsider, those rich in confidence and chances to those who despair of either.”*

(Peel, Mark: Arguing for a Fairer Australia, The Age, 1 March 2006)



## GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

### Federal Government

*“I don’t want to live in a country where we simply discard people,” Mr Rudd said. ‘I don’t want to live in a country where we accept people begging on the streets is somehow acceptable to the Australian way of life ... We are not like that.’”*

(Pearlman, Jonathon: Shame on us, Rudd pleads for homeless, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2008)

The present government and, in particular, the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, have of late put homelessness on the nation’s political and social agenda. In January 2008 the Prime Minister announced that the Government’s first White Paper will be a policy document canvassing long-term options to reduce the growing number of homeless people in Australia and that Labor will fulfil its election pledge to spend \$150 million on new places in crisis shelters. (Pearlman, Jonathon: Shame on us: Rudd pleads for homeless, Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 2008) Tony Nicholoso, the executive director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence as been appointed to oversee the White Paper which is expected to be released in August 2008.

Housing issues have also been discussed as part of the recent Federal Government 2020 Summit. Housing was raised as a significant issue appearing in pre - summit submissions:

*“Most submissions concerned the issue of work-family balance, strengthening communities (including the capacity of the not-for-profit sector) and housing affordability and homelessness.”*

(Australia 2020: Initial Summit Report 2008)

The following statements on housing issues appeared in the 2020 Initial Summit Report, April 2008, and speak to a community commitment to addressing housing issues and homelessness:

- *Submissions dealing with housing and homelessness contained a wide array of proposals to increase affordability and the stock of low-income housing;*
- *Establish a future fund for investment to heal and build children’s, families’ and communities’ capacity to participate and function, fund housing and major capital works, and invest in innovation.*

The Rudd Federal Government has also confirmed the Government’s commitment to sustainable housing in a speech delivered by the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP, in which she spoke to a number of key initiatives targeting the current housing crisis in Australia which include:

### First Home Savers Accounts

Targets first home buyers saving for a deposit:

*“The Government will pay a contribution on up to \$5,000 (indexed) of individual contributions made each year, and individuals can contribute a maximum of \$10,000 each year (indexed);*

*Investment earnings (or interest) that accrues in the accounts will be taxed at 15 per cent;*

*Withdrawals will be tax free where they are used to purchase a first home to live in.”*

(Australian Government, The Treasury, [www.treasury.gov.au](http://www.treasury.gov.au))

The Government confirmed its intention to introduce this in February 2008 and to introduce supporting legislation in July of 2008.

(Australian Government, The Treasury, [www.treasury.gov.au](http://www.treasury.gov.au))

### Housing Affordability Fund

The Government will be investing \$500 million *“...to lower the cost of building new homes by working with all levels of government, particularly local government, to reform infrastructure and planning requirements....The Housing Affordability Fund will be available to local government, potentially in partnership with developers, or even to State and Territory Governments, for projects that will make a real difference to the cost of new homes.”*

(Plibersek, The Hon, Tanya (MP) Minister for Housing, Minister for the Status of Women: Speech to the 2008 Planning Institute of Australia National Congress, April 2008)

### **National Rental Affordability Scheme**

The Minister describes this scheme as “...perhaps the most ambitious of the Government’s new housing policy commitments.”

(Plibersek, The Hon, Tanya (MP) Minister for Housing, Minister for the Status of Women: Speech to the 2008 Planning Institute of Australia National Congress, April 2008)

In essence, the scheme aims to increase the number of affordable rentals by providing an annual incentive to institutional investors to build new homes and rent them to low and moderate income earners at 20% below market rents. The Government anticipates that the scheme will bring 50,000 properties in the first five years and a following 100,000 in the following five years. To date the technical details of the scheme have not been released.

### **National Housing Supply Council and Land Release**

The Government has announced that it will be establishing a “...National Housing Supply Council to assess current and future demand for housing across Australia.”

The purpose of the Council will be to “...publish an annual State of Supply report to analyse the adequacy of construction and land supply for the next 20 years.” The aim of this initiative is to “...ensure that land sales are used to help increase the supply of affordable housing.”

(Plibersek, The Hon, Tanya (MP) Minister for Housing, Minister for the Status of Women: Speech to the 2008 Planning Institute of Australia National Congress, April 2008)

### **Federal Budget 2008**

In the 2008 budget, the Government announced the details of a number of initiatives intended to address housing affordability, including:

- *First home saver accounts including 15% tax rate on returns, a flat 17% Government co-contribution on the first \$5000 deposited and tax free withdrawals if used to buy or build a home.*
- *\$623 million rental affordability scheme to encourage landlords to cut rental prices for low income earners,*
- *\$512 million housing affordability fund to make it easier to free up land for housing, and a*
- *National Housing Supply Council to identify land that could be used for housing to avoid property bubbles*

(The Age, 14 May 2008)

With respect to homelessness, the budget made available \$100 million funding over the next four years for the construction of 600 new homes for homeless people across the nation.

(Daily Telegraph, 14 May 2008)

## State Government

There have been two key government initiatives targeting homelessness in Victoria since 2000. In 2001, the State government developed its 'homelessness strategy' which identified 5 key strategies:

- Improving client focus and outcomes;
- Developing an integrated and sustainable
- Service system;
- Working across government and with the community
- To prevent homelessness;
- Increasing access to, and supply of, affordable housing; and
- Supporting and driving change.  
(Victorian State Government: Victorian Homeless Strategy 2001)

Notwithstanding this, in 2008, homelessness in Victoria remains a major social issue, with little respite on the horizon.

More recently with the massive crisis in affordability combined with the ongoing failings of the current social and public housing systems the State government has responded by committing:

*"...\$510.4 million to boost access to affordable housing, including construction or replacement of 2,350 public and social dwellings."*

(Victorian State Government: A Fairer Victoria Report 2007)

It is the Government's intention to provide:

*"...\$500 million in new investment in social and public housing to ensure that Victorians have access to affordable accommodation. This investment will tackle the shortage of social housing and stimulate building activity. It will provide \$300 million to leverage non-government equity for 1,550 units for social housing managed by housing associations, with an additional \$200 million to provide 800 units of public housing. This will deliver a total of 2,350 new or re-developed dwellings over four years."*

(Victorian State Government: A Fairer Victoria Report 2007)

The social housing aspect of this initiative involves significant changes to the development, delivery and management of community and public housing in Victoria. Social housing under this model will be delivered by registered housing agencies, and will have the capacity to:

*"...undertake new housing initiatives based on a mix of government funds and private sector investment to meet specific housing needs. Other agencies becoming registered as housing providers will manage rental housing properties on behalf of government."*

(Department of Human Services, www.dhs.vic.gov.au, November 2006)

All agencies managing housing on behalf of the Director of Housing are expected to register as either a housing association or housing provider by December 2008. There are a number of agencies across the State already registered, at this stage locally it is anticipated that WAYSS will register as a housing provider this year.



### State Government Budget 2008

The release of the State Government 2008/09 budget in May included a number of housing initiatives:

- \$15 million over four years for the Department of Planning and Community Development to provide more land for housing and reduce costs for purchasers by working with the three tiers of Government to release land faster and at less cost;
- \$37.9 million to deliver additional housing in high demand areas such as Ringwood, Werribee, Ballarat, Bendigo, Horsham, Frankston, Dandenong and Footscray, as well as more housing for indigenous people;
- \$29.1 million over four years for the Opening Doors initiative to improve access to housing and homelessness services, by streamlining assessment for housing assistance; and
- \$4.2 million over four years to support vulnerable social housing tenants maintain tenancies.

(Minister for Housing: \$86.2million to put housing in reach of more Victorians [www.budget.vic.au](http://www.budget.vic.au))

Commenting on these initiatives, the Minister for Housing, Richard Wynne, said:

*"...initiatives announced today built on the biggest single investment in public housing by any State Government in Australia – \$510 million for 2350 affordable homes – announced in last year's State Budget."*

(Minister for Housing: \$86.2million to put housing in reach of more Victorians [www.budget.vic.au](http://www.budget.vic.au))

Notwithstanding these State government initiatives, the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) commenting on the budget noted that:

*"...the real disappointment in this budget is that the increases in spending are patchy and often highly targeted while some social spending actually goes backwards."*

(VCOSS: Victoria not yet best and fairest, Media Release, 6 May 2008)

DEPARTMENT OUTPUT AREA	2007/08 Target \$	2008/09 Target \$	Real Effective Change
Housing	383.7	376	-8.52%
Homelessness Assistance	129.2	140.2	3.80%
Long Term Housing Assistance	254.5	226.8	-14.76%

**An analysis by VCOSS of real spending increases, adjusted for inflation and population growth in the area of housing found the following**

(VCOSS: Victoria not yet best and fairest, Media Release, 6 May 2008)

## Causes: The Local Frame

Homelessness on the Peninsula occurs in a very particular economic, social and environmental context. Issues such as limited access to public transport, inadequate health resources, limited access to mental health services, seasonal and casualised employment opportunities, and scarce tertiary educational opportunities are all contributors to social disadvantage and are evidence of some of the structural causes of homelessness on the Peninsula.

A 2007 report by Jesuit Social Services, looking at the distribution of disadvantage in Australia, identified four small areas on the Peninsula in its list of the 40 highest-ranking postcode areas on 'disadvantage' factor in Victoria. In order of greatest disadvantage they are Rosebud West, Hastings, parts of Mornington, and the Rosebud area and its surrounds.

(Vinson, Tony: Dropping of the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney 2007)

The experiences of homeless locals and workers support the structural and individual explanations of homelessness. For them, homelessness was much more than houselessness. People who are homeless identified the following issues relating to their homelessness - lack of affordable accommodation,

alienation from family, mental health issues, financial insecurity, housing insecurity and experiences of trauma, loss and displacement.

Colin talked about a loss of affordable accommodation:

*"I used to rent here on the Peninsula before that, in the days where there still was affordable accommodation, now I don't even look because I know I can't afford it, even camping is becoming expensive."*

*"From where I am it looks as if the dollar has taken over, property speculation is driving prices through the roof which has driven people into the rental market which has driven up rents which has meant people like me have fallen off the bottom of the ladder."*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

He also spoke about being alienated from family members and general concerns about his mental health:

*"With my loneliness I think it also goes back to my traumatic childhood, which is why I tend to withdraw and various traumatic things that have happened to me in my life - so there is a mental health aspect to it, as I am sure you have found in your research."*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Andrew talked briefly about the difficulty of leaving prison and finding a home (the last time Andrew was inside was 17 years ago), but he went on to comment on the lack of affordable rentals:

*"The rents are too high; the ordinary person can't pay them."*  
(Andrew, Community Consultation 2007)

For Jai and Karen, who have been living independently since they were 13 and 14, it was about family breakdown and a series of financial over-commitments and debts which made it impossible for them to get private rental.

Mark identified poverty as the cause of his homelessness, but also went on to explain his response to ongoing loss and how this affects him:

*"In my case even if I had a place or the money to get a place I couldn't have got one, because I didn't want to lose another place, you know what I mean, I didn't want to have anything, because I didn't want people to take it off me."*  
(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

Mark has been homeless off and on since he was 15 and generally talked about family breakdown, family

support and survival. Describing his circumstances at age 15, Mark reflected that he didn't have control over the events that impacted on him:

*"No, nothing in my control, I survived; I'm still here, so I did the right thing, as far as I'm concerned."*  
(Mark, Community Consultation 2007)

For Stella, a caravan park resident, her first experience of homelessness was about money and disputed debts. Currently it's about housing insecurity, having limited tenancy rights, and bullying.

Overwhelmingly local workers identified people with mental health issues as a significant proportion of the homeless people who were using their services. They talked about a lack of available mental health services as well as a lack of appropriate, affordable and available housing. A local community organisation snap shot of service users in 2005 revealed that approximately 70% of people accessing their service had experienced a mental health issue. The same agency also pointed out that the resources to support people were not locally available:

*"When we did a snap shot about 2.5 years ago, 69 point something of our cases had mental health issues - diagnosable"*

*mental health issues – part of that was personality disorder – the resources aren't there. The community carries a lot of mental health issues that the mental health system doesn't deal with."*

(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

Another agency talked about changes in the people who were presenting as homeless and the lack of resources available to support them:

*"The first group of homeless people who started using the Centre, between 2000 and 2002, (she described as) the 'heroin years'. At the time there was a large transient population who were using and were also homelessness. They tended to move through, rather than be local. The homeless people that the Centre sees now (2007) have changed. In the main they are older, aged 50 – 60, many have mental health issues. They have entrenched mental health issues, but receive little or no support. In the past homeless people would have been referred to motels or caravan parks, these resources have almost disappeared...there are no resources now. 5 or 6 years ago we could do something – now there is nothing available."*

(Centre Manager {2000 – 2007}, Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, Community Consultation 2007)





## A LOCAL HOUSING CRISIS

### Overview

*“So it’s all hit and miss, if I can use that terminology. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose and it’s just a continual merry go round.”*

(Community Health Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

Currently the Peninsula lacks affordable, appropriate, or available housing. The situation is at crisis point. The Office of Housing has identified the Shire as being one of the highest needs municipalities in the State for affordable housing. It is currently listed as 19 out of 79 Victorian municipalities based on a Composite Needs Distribution Index of Affordable Housing - waiting list demand, low income levels, allocations, supply of affordable rental and level of rental assistance.

(Office of Housing 2007/8)

The Peninsula ‘housing crisis’ to some degree mirrors state and national trends however we are also experiencing some very Peninsula and coastal specific changes. Some of these are flowing from the sea and tree changers - the property boom, gentrification and the disappearance of traditional cheaper rental properties:

*“There used to be sort of low class housing here, but I suppose it’s been pulled down as the land value has been changing.”*

(Local Volunteer, Community Consultation 2007)

Part of this process of change has been due to the increasing property values. We have witnessed significant increases in house, land and private rental costs. For example, in Hastings, in 2002, the median house price was approximately \$150,000 and in 2008 the median price is \$245,000.

A number of workers commented on the general ‘hidden’ nature of the housing crisis on the Peninsula, and a community ignorance of the issue. Hidden either in the community consciousness because of how homelessness is understood. In this scenario there is a community ‘mindset’ that interprets homelessness as an exception - a result of individual misadventure or misfortune – either bad or sad. Alternatively they are hidden in inappropriate, unsafe and substandard housing. Jai, Karen and Max found themselves living in a motel for two weeks while they waited for a transitional house; others have disappeared onto the foreshore as campers or into caravan parks, friend’s couches, empty houses and beach boxes while they wait for something better.

Workers have identified a range of critical housing deficits on the Peninsula, these included - inadequate emergency youth housing, (only one youth refuge, no youth hostels), limited accommodation for singles and in particular single men, no local rooming house style accommodation, limited housing opportunities for older

people with a growing demand for nursing homes, hostel and accommodation for the aged on low incomes. Put simply, on the Peninsula if you need support with housing, it is going to be very difficult whether you are young, older, single or part of a family, in good health or not – you will struggle to maintain your place:

*“I’ll be honest with you, if a case comes through the door and there are housing issues, we almost go aaaaargh you have it, you have it – you know what I mean it’s really – its one of those issues that we almost like want to run away from. Too hard basket.”*

(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

The lack of local emergency accommodation (immediate overnight to short term) is an ongoing issue of great concern to local workers. Workers often hit a brick wall trying to find accommodation for people:

*“We will suggest people go to the Crisis Centre in Frankston the only emergency accommodation available is in the inner city areas but occasionally they may be able to access a caravan park or arrange to provide a tent on the foreshore in the southern area of the Peninsula.”*

(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

Currently a local solution to a housing crisis can be, and has been, a tent on the foreshore. In the past workers had been able to use local motels and or caravan parks for emergency crisis accommodation, even this dubious housing source has all but disappeared on the Peninsula. Workers reported that managers are increasingly reluctant to take on their clients:

*“We’ve had experience recently where clients have been thrown into temporary homelessness and we had needed to find emergency accommodation and staff have done the ring around to the motels and caravan parks and 95% of motels and caravan parks would not accept a referral from us, even though it was guaranteed payment, but they supposedly thought they knew the sorts of people that we were putting in there and they refused to take our booking.”*

(Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

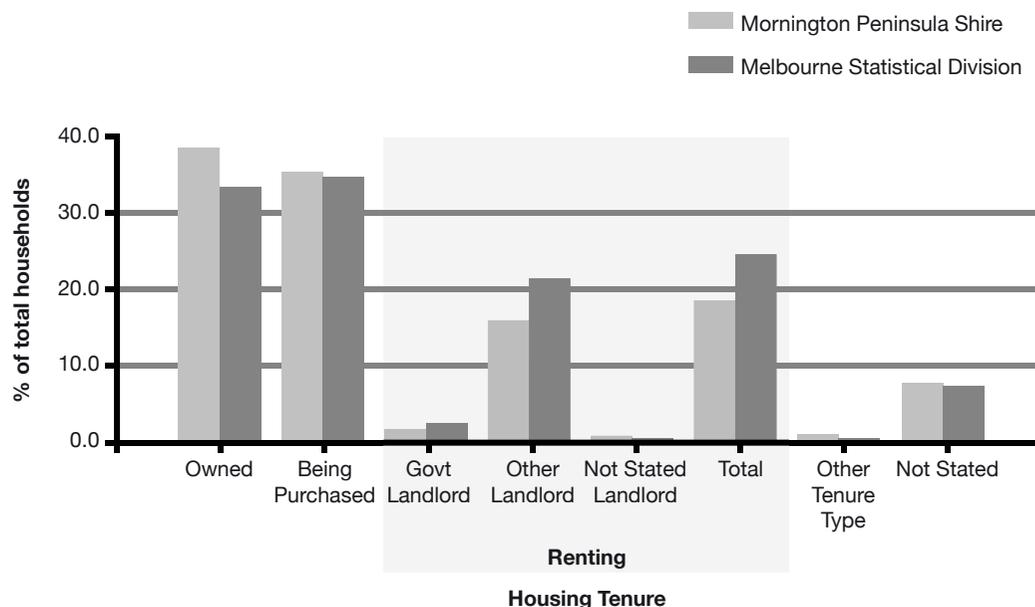
Caravan parks, once seen as an affordable housing alternative, no longer provide cheap accommodation with van rentals costing between \$180 and \$220 per week. Parks are targeting the longer term/permanent tenant or holiday tourist and are often reluctant to take on an emergency client. Workers also raised concerns about the suitability of a caravan park for people in crisis.

### Peninsula Renters

According to the 2006 Census 18.3% of people living on the Peninsula at the time of the Census were renters. The majority rented from private landlords with a few renting government properties (see Table 8). Current research on the impact of the lack of affordable housing indicates an increased vulnerability of renters to housing insecurity and homelessness.

The majority of Peninsula renters live in Area 5, Hastings where 36.1% of people rent. However this area also has the highest percentage of community and public housing. Other areas with a higher number of renters than the 18.3% Shire total were Area 8 Mornington - Moorooduc - Tuerong with 26.6%, Area 3 Dromana - Safety Beach with 21.2%, and Area 13 Rosebud - Rosebud West - McCrae - Boneo - Fingal - Cape Schanck with 21%. Rental availability on the Peninsula is shrinking. DHS statistics for the June 2007 quarter revealed a decline in new lettings. Across the State the decline was 3.3%, in metropolitan Melbourne new lettings were down 3.9% and in the country 1.8%. On the Mornington Peninsula between June 2006 and June 2007 new lettings decreased by 2.34%.

Rental costs have increased. DHS statistics show increases in median rents on the Mornington Peninsula. In the June 2007 quarter the Peninsula experienced a 1.9% median rent quarterly increase – a 7.9% real annual increase and over the past 5 years median rents have increased by 10.6%. The median rent in the June quarter was \$220 per week. (see Table 9 Right)



**Housing Tenure, MPS & Melbourne Statistical Division, 2006 (Enumerated data)**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population & Housing (Enumerated)

REGION	JUNE Q 2007	QUARTERLY CHANGE	REAL CHANGE ANNUAL	REAL CHANGE 5 YRS
INNER MELBOURNE	\$340	7.9%	9.3%	10.8%
INNER EASTERN MELBOURNE	\$295	5.4%	9.2%	12.8%
SOUTHERN MELBOURNE	\$300	7.1%	11.0%	20.0%
WESTERN MELBOURNE	\$230	4.5%	12.8%	12.4%
NORTH WESTERN MELBOURNE	\$250	4.2%	11.4%	15.8%
NORTH EASTERN MELBOURNE	\$250	4.2%	6.6%	10.0%
OUTER EASTERN MELBOURNE	\$245	2.1%	6.8%	13.5%
SOUTH EASTERN MELBOURNE	\$220	0.0%	7.9%	13.9%
MORNINGTON PENINSULA	\$220	1.9%	7.9%	10.6%
BARWON-SOUTH WEST	\$210	5.0%	5.6%	19.2%
GIPPSLAND	\$170	0.0%	4.2%	19.7%
GOULBOURN- OVENS-MURRAY	\$190	2.7%	3.5%	11.4%
LODDON-MALLEE	\$190	0.0%	3.5%	11.4%
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS- WIMMERA	\$180	0.0%	0.9%	9.2%

**Table 9 Median rents and change by statistical region (June quarter 2007)**  
(Source: DHS Rental Report 2007)

AREA	LOWEST GROUP	MEDIUM LOWEST	MEDIUM HIGHEST	HIGHEST GROUP
AREA 9 MOUNT ELIZA	21.7	17.3	24.8	36.2
AREA 10 MOUNT MARTHA	17	20.3	30.9	31.8
AREA 7 MORNINGTON EAST	19	21.4	39	20.7
AREA 12 RED HILL - RED HILL SOUTH - MERRICKS NORTH - MAIN RIDGE - ARTHURS SEAT	51.9	20.2	12.7	15.2
AREA 4 FLINDERS - SHOREHAM - POINT LEO	39.3	24.3	22.1	14.3
AREA 11 PORTSEA - SORRENTO - BLAIRGOWRIE	38	30.1	17.8	14.1
AREA 8 MORNINGTON - MOOROODUC - TUERONG	35.8	30.8	20.9	12.5
AREA 3 DROMANA - SAFETY BEACH	32.7	35.2	24	8.1
AREA 1 BALNARRING - BALNARRING BEACH - MERRICKS - MERRICKS BEACH - SOMERS	35.6	29.1	27.7	7.6
AREA 14 RYE - TOOTGAROOK - ST ANDREWS BEACH	35	41.8	17.8	5.4
AREA 15 SOMERVILLE - TYABB - BAXTER - PEARCEDALE	30.2	35.6	28.9	5.4
AREA 2 BITTERN - CRIB POINT	37.3	39.9	18	4.9
AREA 13 ROSEBUD - ROSEBUD WEST - MCCRAE - BONEO - FINGAL - CAPE SCHANCK	43.3	38.9	14.2	3.6
AREA 5 HASTINGS	46.5	35.8	14.2	3.5

**Table 10 Housing Rental Quartiles - Mornington Peninsula Shire (2006)**

(Source: MPS Website, [www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au), Community Atlas, <http://www.id.com.au/profile/Default.aspx?id=118>)

Analysis of the 2006 Census data identified Mount Eliza, Mount Martha and Mornington East as the township areas with the largest number of renters in the highest quartile (least affordable on the basis of income and rental costs, see Table 10).

An analysis of the 2006 census data by i.d. solutions identified specific areas of the Mornington Peninsula experiencing rental stress. Rental Stress is defined as per the NATSEM (National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling) model as households in the lowest 40% of equivalised incomes (income adjusted using equivalence factors to remove the effect of household size on income) across Australia, who are paying more than 30% of their usual gross weekly income on rent. [www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au), Community Atlas

Their analysis's is derived from the following census questions; '...which best describes this dwelling?' (owned outright, owned with a mortgage, rented etc), 'How much does this household pay for this dwelling?' and 'What is the gross income (including pensions and allowances) that the person usually receives each week from all sources?' ([www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au), Community Atlas)

Their area analysis found;

In 2006, 32.1% of the Mornington Peninsula Shire's renting households were experiencing rental stress compared to 25.6% in the Melbourne Statistical Division.

While the Mornington Peninsula Shire had a relatively higher proportion of households experiencing rental stress, it is important to note that this varied across the Shire. Proportions ranged from a low of 0.0% in Area 6 HMAS Cerberus to a high of 43.6% in Tyabb Structure Plan. The five areas with the highest percentages were:

- Tyabb Structure Plan (43.6%)
- Area 13 Rosebud - Rosebud West - McCrae - Boneo - Fingal - Cape Schanck (39.2%)
- Area 1 Balnarring - Balnarring Beach - Merricks - Merricks Beach - Somers (37.8%)
- Area 14 Rye - Tootgarook - St Andrews Beach (36.5%)
- Area 5 Hastings (35.9%)

([www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au), Community Atlas)

The recent Jesuit Social Services research on the distribution of disadvantage indicates that there is some correlation between renters and social disadvantage on the Peninsula. Areas identified in order of greatest disadvantage were Rosebud West, Hastings, Tuerong, Rosebud area and surrounds. (Vision, Tony: Dropping of the Edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia, Faculty of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney 2007) Rosebud, Rosebud West, and Hastings have been identified as areas of significant rental stress.

Anecdotal evidence from workers supports a pattern of increasing rental costs and the subsequent reduction in rental affordability on the Peninsula, with workers noting that rents at the lower end of the market have also increased and become unaffordable. Local Hastings workers reported that:

*"Costs of rental accommodation, \$220 per week for a 2 bedroom unit in Bittern, work it out on a disability pension! You end up with \$10 left for everything! At Crib Point you will pay \$180, Crib Point is increasing faster than Hastings."*

(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

Workers from the southern end of the Peninsula reported similar increases in rentals leading to changing populations:

*"...and the affordability and availability, places like Dromana and Safety Beach rents have gone whoosh – we hardly get clients from there now, we have whole pockets/ areas where we don't get clients from – the rents just – look they are out of the market."* (Anglicare, Mornington Peninsula, Community Consultation 2007)

Rental affordability is a big issue on the Peninsula, particularly for people receiving Centrelink benefits. According to the DHS Rent Reporter for the June 2007 quarter:

- Single people receiving Newstart, there were 17 one bedroom affordable properties, which represents 17% of all available one bedroom properties;
- For a single parent with one child there were 158 affordable 2 bedroom properties, which represents 42% of all available properties;
- For a couple with 2 children receiving Newstart, there were 319 affordable properties, i.e. 43% of all available properties; and,
- For a couple on Newstart with 4 children there were 70 available properties, which represent 38% of all available properties.

Overall, on the Mornington Peninsula, there were 560 affordable properties for people in receipt of Centrelink incomes.

A consequence of this more competitive rental environment is the practice of renting out substandard properties:

*“A lot of the private rental available is substandard, houses with no heating, holes in the walls, toilets outside, LPG gas cylinders. We had one client whose hot water service was briquette heated; we payed for an electric blanket for one client who was freezing in a house with no heating.”*  
(Centre Manager {2000 – 2007}, Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre, Community Consultation 2007)

Workers have also commented on the emergence of rent bidding, as a consequence of the increasing competitiveness for a shrinking number of properties:

*“I think the main contributor really boils down to a simple issue of affordability -access and affordability. I mean we are seeing clients who have made up to 30 applications for a tenancy and still not been successful and our staff have spoken to some of the real estate agents and understandably real estate agents and private landlords make decisions made on what they believe to be commercial*

*viability. They have an investment and they have a responsibility to protect that investment, they are taking the best applicant, and at the end of the day many of the clients that an organisation like ours serves and our sister organisation Peninsula Youth and Family Services, are on fixed incomes, Centrelink benefits or what are by definition these days we would call the working poor, and are not particularly attractive options to real-estate agents. Now in some cases we certainly are seeing an increase in rent bidding in this area. We are talking about the Peninsula, where people have only been successful where they have offered up to 8 weeks rent in advance or have offered \$20 over the advertised price of the property, which in many cases would make the sustainability of that tenancy for them very questionable.”*  
(WAYSS Ltd. Housing and Support Services, Community Consultation 2007)

Harsh and inappropriate rental practices are also a concern. Commenting on the state of the private rental market, one agency commented on how ‘harsh’ the rental market could be in its treatment of struggling tenants:

*“I asked for a person facing eviction, for a little more breathing space, the response was you have until four this afternoon, to find the money.”*  
(Community Worker, Hastings, Community Consultation 2007)

Recently a number of articles have appeared in the local papers concerning homelessness. One article reported on a Safety Beach woman’s rental experience and the allegedly reprehensible behaviour of her landlord. She claims:

*“...to be trapped in a home she wants to leave by a landlord who allegedly chain sawed the back stairs.”*  
(The Mail, Mornington and Southern Peninsula: Stairway to Trouble, vol 21. no.33, 17 August 2006)

In the article Ms Davis allegedly rented the property two years ago with her husband and under 12 month old daughter for \$200 per week (12 month lease):

*“She says that the landlord would only accept cash and added another \$20 per week when her family took in a 21 year old homeless man. When the original lease ran out, the landlord increased the rent by an additional \$20 per week, plus \$20 for driveway maintenance...the landlord phoned to say the rent was \$300 a week and \$60 had been added to the latest bill for lawn mowing...That was the last straw.”*  
(The Mail, Mornington and Southern Peninsula: Stairway to Trouble, vol 21, no 33, 17 August 2006)

In another instance, Deb Morris, writing for The Mail (local newspaper) reported on the experiences of a local woman, homeless with her partner and 4 children:

*“The woman and her partner and 4 children pay \$400 per week for a Mornington motel room with no cooking facilities other than a microwave, no bath, no space. ‘I have been waiting 11 years for public housing and am still looking at least another 2 years’ she said. She claims to have been a victim of a real estate fraud. ‘I was renting a three bedroom home in Mt Martha for \$975 a month when I fell into arrears with my rent over Christmas.’ She followed up through the local paper for an advocate – who seemed to be able to help keep her in housing for another six months, but then she found that the person had been hanging onto the money – now she is unable to rent anywhere as she has massive arrears. ‘I’ve put my name down for emergency housing but because we were living in the motel it was not considered an emergency. It’s been nine weeks and I can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel...the kids are coping at the moment, but they are getting agitated. I can see it in their faces...I feel that if I could get a house with a proper lease I could turn my life around. I want to go back to work, it’s driving me crazy being unemployed. My eldest is starting high school next year. It’s really urgent. It couldn’t get more urgent.”*  
(Morris, Deb: Rent scam ‘traps’ family in motel, The Mail, Mornington and Southern Peninsula, vol 21, 10 August 2007)

Particular groups of people also experienced greater difficulty than others in accessing the private rental market; local workers identified indigenous people, young people, people leaving prison and single men as experiencing significant difficulties in accessing the private rental market. For example, Peninsula Youth and Family Services identified a gap in accommodation options for single people living with a chronic illness aged between 40 to 60 years old.

(Katlynx Consulting: Emergency/Transitional Housing Properties on the Peninsula, Future Strategies for the Management of Properties with Joint Ownership Between the Office of Housing and the Mornington Peninsula Shire, December 2006)

### Peninsula Buyers

According to the 2006 Census data, the majority, 38%, of people living on the Mornington Peninsula had purchased their homes and a further 35% were in the process of purchasing.

Mortgage Stress is defined as per the NATSEM (National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling) model as households in the lowest 40% of equivalised incomes (income adjusted using equivalence factors to remove the effect of household size on income) across Australia, who are paying more than 30% of their usual gross weekly income on home loan repayments.

I.d. solutions used the following 2006 census questions to determine the levels of mortgage stress on the Mornington Peninsula;

'...which best describes this dwelling?' (owned outright, owned with a mortgage, rented etc)', 'How much does this household pay for this dwelling?' and 'What is the gross income (including pensions and allowances) that the person usually receives each week from all sources?'

Their analysis identified the following areas of significant mortgage stress:

In 2006, 11.2% of the Mornington Peninsula Shire's households purchasing their dwelling were experiencing mortgage stress compared to 10.4% in the Melbourne Statistical Division.

While the Mornington Peninsula Shire had a relatively higher proportion of households experiencing mortgage stress, it is important to note that this varied across the Shire. Proportions ranged from a low of 0.0% in Area 6 HMAS Cerberus to a high of 17.5% in Tyabb Structure Plan. The five areas with the highest percentages were:

- Tyabb Structure Plan (17.5%)
- Area 14 Rye - Tootgarook - St Andrews Beach (17.5%)
- Area 13 Rosebud - Rosebud West - McCrae - Boneo - Fingal - Cape Schanck (14.1%)
- Area 3 Dromana - Safety Beach (13.3%)
- Area 5 Hastings (13.2%)

([www.mornpen.vic.gov.au](http://www.mornpen.vic.gov.au), Community Atlas)

### Community and Public Housing on the Peninsula

*"We have to go into private rental because for some of our clients their chances of getting public housing are like 15 to 20 years away."*

(Community Health Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

People seeking community or public housing on the Peninsula face similar challenges to those looking in the private rental market. All workers commented on the lack of community and public housing, long waiting lists, no exit plans for people leaving transitional housing and a lack of crisis/emergency housing on the Peninsula. There was a consensus amongst agencies that local community and public housing was unable to meet local demand. Workers also identified a lack of on the ground local housing support workers for the homeless. Even when on the surface the situation looks more promising, for example, for older residents:

*"The wait if an applicant is eligible for Segment 1-3 is 6-12 months for the Peninsula and 3-6 months for Westernport. They say this is quite variable depending on turnover. Sometimes, it is longer and other times a bit shorter."*

(Jeff Fiedler, Tenancy Advice Worker, Housing for the Aged Action Group 2007)

When eligibility for Segment 1 housing is factored in the outcomes for older residents are far less promising:

*"The other factor that our services find frustrating is that many older people, even in their 80's, are not eligible for Segments 1-3 because older people are rarely homeless because they sacrifice everything to ensure they have a roof over their head. They also may not have a serious illness or disability that makes them eligible for Segs 2-3. Years ago older people who reached 75 years of age were given automatic priority and we have campaigned for that to be re-introduced with a lower age of 65. So generally we publicly quote the general wait turn figure as it encompasses the majority of older people, which is 3-5 years for the Mornington Peninsula."*

(Jeff Fiedler, Tenancy Advice Worker, Housing for the Aged Action Group 2007)

## **Demand**

Demand for community and public housing and support services is considerable on the Peninsula. In 2001 in Melbourne the largest concentrations of public housing waiting list applicants were found around Brimbank, Darebin, Dandenong and the Mornington Peninsula. (Randolph, Bill & Holloway, Darren: Assistance and the spatial concentration of low income households in metropolitan Australia, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, UNSW-UWS Research Centre, AHURI Final Report No. 101, June 2007). Anecdotally, in 2008, all services supported this finding.

The following information provided by WAYSS Housing and Support Services Ltd, applies to the Frankston, the Mornington Peninsula, Dandenong, Casey and Cardinia local government areas and gives an indication of the demand:

Over the ten years WAYSS Ltd Housing and Support Services provided the following:

- The Transitional Housing Management program which has been operating for 10 years has assisted with 23,000 requests for housing establishment funds;
- the Housing information and referral services have had about 250,000 requests for information, assistance and referral to support programs;
- WAYSS Ltd tenancy staff have administered 3,367 tenancies; and
- in the six months to June 2007, there were 1,638 Housing Establishment Fund assists for a total of \$345,000, of this some 1,200 crisis/motel nights were purchased at a cost of \$90,000 or \$75 per night on average.”
- Rosebud Peninsula Youth and Family Services provided a 6 month snap shot from November 2006 to April 2007. During that period:
  - “504 new people visited the agency seeking assistance about housing (Frankston & Rosebud offices);
  - of those, 144 have no fixed address (approx 30%);
  - 113 are from the Peninsula (this is understated as they are also represented in the no fixed address category).

## Supply

In 1999, in the Mornington Peninsula Shire local government area there was a total of 1,173 Director (Office of Housing) owned stock. In 2007 this had increased to 1,229 (see Table 12) - a 4.56% increase over nine years.

\*With respect to crisis and transitional properties WAYSS Ltd provided the following detailed information. There are 32 properties for crisis and transitional response (see Table 13) in the Mornington Peninsula Local Government Area.

In addition to these properties the Mornington Peninsula Shire has joint ownership of 4 properties with the Office of Housing through the previous Local Government and Community Housing Program (LGCHP). These properties are for medium to long term tenancies.

The experience of local people who are homeless and agencies is that the available community and public housing opportunities are totally inadequate to meet Peninsula demands, particularly because people who become homeless on the Peninsula, or are experiencing housing insecurity, want to stay local.

Of additional concern to local workers, was the absence of local emergency accommodation, short term and/or overnight. Commenting on this the CEO of WAYSS said:

*“Emergency accommodation by that definition actually doesn’t exist anywhere in metropolitan Melbourne. Emergency accommodation by that definition only exists in the large shelters in the city, the likes of Hanover Southbank. The first one of its type outside the inner city was established last year in Dandenong and that has very limited capacity, however crisis accommodation does exist on the Peninsula. We have technically got 32 properties that people enter on the Mornington Peninsula for an initial tenancy for 60 days.”*

(CEO, WAYSS Housing and Support Ltd, Community Consultation 2007)

The other main issue that was raised with respect to public housing was the length of waiting lists. Time on the waiting list is dependant on both the urgency of the persons/families circumstances and the type of housing they are seeking. Public housing requests are divided into 4 distinct segments, i.e. Segment 1 - Recurring Homelessness – being the most urgent, Segment 2 - Supported Housing applicants Segment 3 - Special Housing Needs applicants and Segment 4 - General Housing applicants being the least urgent, and on the type of housing required – one two, three or four bedroom properties.

## SUMMARY OF DIRECTOR OWNED STOCK INCLUDING SHORT LEASES BY PROGRAM TYPE

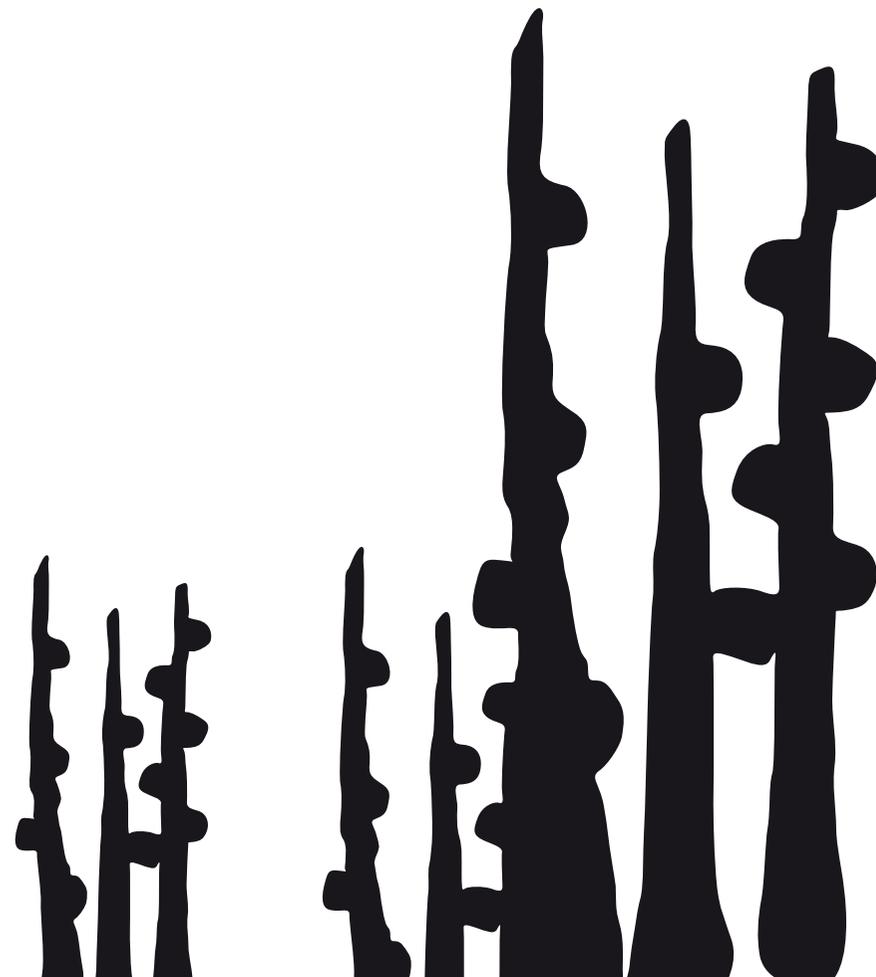
	AT 30 JUNE 1999	AT 30 JUNE 2007
Public rental	1131	1184
Indigenous housing	5	9
Long term community housing	4	2
Crisis supported housing	0	0
Transitional Housing	33	34*
Total	1173	1229

**Table 12 Summary of Director owned stock including short leases by program type**

(Source: Office of Housing 2007)

MORNINGTON	ROSEBUD AREA	HASTINGS
7 x 2 bedroom	5 x 2 bedroom	4 x 2 bedroom
5 x 3 bedroom	4 x 3 bedroom	4 x 3 bedroom
1 x 4 bedroom		2 x 4 bedroom
(2 Youth – Fusion, 7 Generalist -PYFS, 4 Domestic Violence) *Information by WAYSS Ltd	(7 Generalist – PYFS, 2 Domestic Violence)	( 4 Generalist – PYFS, 2 ATSI – Ngwlala, 4 Domestic Violence)

**Table 13 Mornington Peninsula Local Government  
Area Crisis and Transitional Properties**



On the Peninsula people with a Segment 1 request for public housing might expect to be waiting for housing for more than a year, but should expect to be housed within 3 years (these are approximations and are dependent on the availability of particular housing stock). People with Segment 2 – 4 requests would not be housed earlier than one year after making a request, with many waiting over 5 years and, in some instances, Segment 4 applicants may be waiting indefinitely (these are approximations and are dependent on the availability of particular housing stock).

Colin had this to say about the availability of public housing:

*“I have been on the list for years already and apparently I don’t get to the top of the list until I’m 65 or whatever. The Brotherhood suggested that I get on the list, I did, and they said really you should be on a shorter list in your circumstances – put your hand up. So I did, and I phoned them and they said ‘ha ha go away you have got a car, sell it and get a flat’. So that’s as far as that went.”*  
(Colin, Community Consultation 2007)

Talking about single people’s access to public housing a Rosebud worker had this to say:

*“Single people on the Peninsula are waiting many years for one bedroom properties*

*because there are very few one bedroom public housing properties in this area. And even on a Segment 1 application the wait is at least three years or more. Single people have trouble getting into private rental at the best of times because of their low income. For those clients who are sleeping rough, getting into trouble who are not clean because they can’t have a shower or change their clothes, it’s impossible. And those with mental health and substance issues who don’t present very well to the real estate agents, who is going to offer them a property? We can’t support them forever.”*  
(Community Worker, Rosebud, Community Consultation 2007)

Domestic violence workers also experienced difficulties in housing women and children. Responding to questions about their chances of organising priority transfers they had this to say:

*“It’s terrible; it’s around a three to five year wait. It’s an awfully long time.*

*If women come into the system with an existing property and they want a priority transfer, it’s somewhat easier; they can move through transitional housing while waiting. However if they ring up after becoming homeless and want a priority transfer, that’s almost impossible. There is actually nowhere for them to live while waiting for the priority*

*transfer, unless you can support them to stay where they are. Meanwhile that place (where they are currently housed) needs to be risk free while they wait for a priority transfer. This immediately degrades their need for a priority transfer, and then it’s back into the cycle.”*  
(Program Manager and Domestic Violence Case Worker, Mornington Peninsula Domestic Violence Service, program of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, Community Consultation 2007)

And even if a woman was already in a refuge, while transitional housing was a possibility, they still anticipated a 2-5 year waiting period for a permanent transfer:

*“It’s still the same timeframe. It’s still two to five years, but at least they are in the system and you can get them into a transitional house, but you can’t get someone into a transitional house from a cold call. If someone rings you and says, look I am going to be evicted today or I can’t live here any longer and I need a priority transfer, the chances are impossible.”*  
(Program Manager and Domestic Violence Case Worker, Mornington Peninsula Domestic Violence Service, program of Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, Community Consultation 2007)

While transitional houses worked for people when they were available, there were concerns about the procedural practice of giving the tenant an eviction notice when

they took up the tenancy, the length of stay, few if any exit points, and the impact of this on already potentially traumatised people:

*“If people are in transitional housing, but get kicked out we can lose track of them, they end up in a very insecure housing situation – moving around and being transient. This can cause problems with the Office of Housing – they can get dropped off the list.”*  
(Indigenous Housing Worker, Community Consultation 2007)

Even those people lucky enough or tenacious enough to get to the end of the waiting list and be offered public housing may find that the housing on offer is not suitable - not where they wanted to live. Choosing not to take up a public housing offer means you go to the bottom of the list, in other words, it’s over. Overwhelmingly, people who are homeless on the Peninsula wanted to stay local so housing in other areas was not a desirable option. Belonging and the importance of staying connected to community is not part of current community and public housing outcomes and remains a significant barrier to accessing appropriate housing:

*“...the allocation process is that you get one shot at it, otherwise you go to the bottom of the list again. A house comes up and that’s it. With Segment 1 you get one crack at it, if they want to be around their community – allocation can often dislocate them...you can’t just pick the area that is close to you.”*

(Indigenous Housing Worker,  
Community Consultation 2007)

An outcome of the Victorian Homeless Strategy is the development and implementation of the Common Homeless Access Point (CHAP). CHAP is a programme designed to give workers a porthole to all available housing vacancies in the south east region with the express purpose of streamlining responses thereby providing better outcomes for the homeless. Local workers acknowledged that the introduction of CHAP has improved their organisational capacity to work with people experiencing homelessness, and that this has delivered some improvements to service delivery, however, in terms of housing stock, this remains in desperately short supply. CHAP has delivered a system, not homes.







## PART 5

# MAKING CHANGES

*“I think that...that gets down to an issue of leadership, and despite pragmatism, that we have politicians and leaders within our society who are prepared to get up and say - well I actually don't really care what your views on this are, this is a matter of fundamental social justice, we are living in a developed country this is not a third world nation yet - this is a developed country. It is not acceptable that anyone within our society does not have shelter.”*

(WAYSS Ltd, Housing and Support Services, Community Consultation 2007)

## Making a Difference

During the process of researching this Report, people who are homeless and their advocates identified the following general areas as priorities:

- increasing community awareness of homelessness, its causes and consequences;
- developing local housing and support solutions to keep people in their communities of choice;
- developing local sustainable, affordable, appropriate and diverse housing solutions;
- ensuring that resources are made available for local emergency/crisis, medium and long term housing;
- addressing social justice issues, including access to affordable public transport, access to affordable medical services, particularly mental health services, increasing local job opportunities, and improving access to tertiary education;
- ensuring resourcing of existing support services and the provision of new services where necessary to support people during difficult times, both now and into the future;
- providing support to families; and
- ensuring that people are not subject to systemic discrimination.

In general, the community expressed a need for an increase in funding to meet the housing and support needs to keep people in their community of choice.

More specifically people identified an immediate need for local crisis accommodation, short, medium and longer term housing. Repeatedly, people talked about being unable to get affordable and appropriate housing and the individual and community costs of failing to do so. This absence of housing was constantly undermining both the support that was being provided to the homeless and also their tenacity to keep going with life.

## Plans Into Action

When people talked about actions, they would nearly always commence with a list of things that must be done as a matter of urgency, including more money, more community and public housing, better support services. Then there would be a moment of reflection and they would go on to talk about political will and leadership.

As a community we have a detailed and firm understanding of what causes homelessness - from people who are homeless, institutions, and agencies locally and across Australia who work on a daily basis with people who are homeless. There is ample information, expertise, ideas and initiative to make a difference. The Shire through its policy statement while recognising the primary role of the Federal and State governments in providing sustainable, affordable and appropriate housing, provides the following action plan and recommendations



# MPS Response to Homelessness

## MPS Policy Position (Adopted by Council 25 August 2008)

### **Mornington Peninsula Shire Policy Statement on Homelessness 2008**

Local Government seeks to contribute to the development and maintenance of diverse, viable and sustainable communities. Economic, social, environmental, and cultural factors all impact on the creation of these communities, including the availability of housing and support services to meet the diverse range of community needs.

(MPS Triple A Housing Strategy 2002)

The importance of housing is well recognised as one of the principal indicators of the state of well being in a community at many different levels including the United Nations Human Rights framework:

*“Access to safe and healthy shelter is essential to a person’s wellbeing and should be a fundamental part of national and international action. The right to adequate housing as a basic human right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.”*

(Agenda 21, United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development, June 1992)

The Mornington Peninsula Shire’s Policy Statement on Homelessness has been inspired by this vision and developed in support of the Shire’s Community Plan.

*“The Mornington Peninsula Shire believes that both the Federal and State governments have primary responsibility for ensuring the rights of people to access affordable, appropriate and secure housing. However, the Shire recognises that, to give effect to its own stated values, local government, in partnership with local communities, other agencies and levels of government, can also play a role in enabling the fulfilment of these rights.*

*The Shire is therefore committed to facilitating a range of housing and community options that mitigate against homelessness, and which, promote improved health and well being outcomes for our diverse communities, particularly those most at risk or disadvantaged.”*

(MPS Triple A Housing Strategy 2002)

The Mornington Peninsula Shire acknowledges that:

- Housing is a human right;
- Homelessness is about people and their connections to community; and that
- Local, state and federal governments, and the community as a whole, have a shared responsibility to ensure the provision of safe, secure, affordable, appropriate and available shelter to all community members.

MPS defines homelessness as including:

- Unsustainable housing;
- Insecure housing;
- Inappropriate housing;
- Unsafe housing, for example, where violence is present; and the
- Loss or potential loss of community.

The MPS recognises that:

- People experience homelessness differently, and/or the absence of housing, unsustainable and or inappropriate housing, and living with the ongoing fear of losing housing;
- The impacts of homelessness go beyond the individual person who is homeless and/or family to include extended family members, friends and advocates;
- Homelessness affects the health and well being of individuals, families, friends and advocates, and in so doing, impacts on the wider community.

# Recommendations

1. That council endorse the *“speaking home truths report, policy statement and action plan on homelessness on the Mornington Peninsula, 2008”*.
2. That council release the report to the public, and promote the findings of the homelessness report to the wider community and relevant state and federal government departments to raise awareness of the complexity of the issues.
3. That council integrate the issues identified in the homelessness report into the Shire’s community plan under the key areas of housing, health & well being, and access and equity.
4. That, more specifically, council in conjunction with the MPS Triple A housing committee and other relevant bodies, establish a homelessness working group in partnership with other stakeholders to:
  - Develop a strategic action plan to engage with state and federal government bodies;
  - Develop strategic alliances and encourage integrated solutions to mitigate against homelessness in the community;
  - Work in partnership with local and state-wide consumer and tenancy agencies to improve security of tenure; for persons reliant on rental and short term accommodation,
  - Continue to advocate on behalf of caravan park residents and low income renters to ensure their rights are protected.
5. That council actively investigate and respond to the federal and state government housing affordability initiatives by:
  - Investigating the use of council land/ properties for an affordable housing fund project in partnership with recognised community housing group;
  - Investigating potential partnership with the community to develop a model that will form the basis of an application to commonwealth housing affordability schemes for the second round of funding (march/april 2009);
  - Advocating to the state government to consider affordable housing development on Lot. 1, 185 - 273 High street, Hastings ( Warringine connections site).
6. That council, where possible, explore partnership arrangements with Habitat for Humanity and other similar organisations;
7. That council commend the participants and contributors to the “speaking home truths” report, including the agency workers and people who are homeless, who so generously gave up their time to tell their story, in often difficult and challenging circumstances.

**MPS TRIPLE A HOUSING STRATEGY  
KEY OBJECTIVES**

**HOMELESSNESS OBJECTIVES**

**RESPONSIBILITY**

**TIMELINE**

<p>1. To monitor housing needs &amp; trends on the Peninsula &amp; review relevant Shire policies on an ongoing basis</p>	<p>To integrate the issues identified in the homelessness report into the SHIRE'S COMMUNITY PLAN under the key areas of HOUSING, HEALTH &amp; WELL BEING, &amp; ACCESS &amp; EQUITY</p> <p>To review the homelessness report as part of the ongoing development &amp; evaluation of the above strategies/policies.</p>	<p>Housing &amp; Social Justice Officer with SP&amp;CD &amp; Shire Corporate Planning</p> <p>Homelessness Working Group, Triple A Housing Committee</p>	<p>Oct. 08 Within 3 yrs</p>
<p>2. To plan &amp; promote housing in the Shire that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is sustainable &amp; of a good design, quality &amp; standard;</li> <li>• Is accessible to a range of services &amp; facilities;</li> <li>• Minimises environmental impact;</li> <li>• Respects neighbourhood character;</li> <li>• Complements the natural environment;</li> <li>• Is affordable; &amp;</li> <li>• Ensures security of tenure.</li> </ul>	<p>To work in partnership with local &amp; state-wide consumer &amp; tenancy agencies to improve security of tenure, particularly for caravan park residents &amp; low income renters to ensure their rights are protected</p>	<p>Homelessness Working Group, Triple A Housing Committee with Housing &amp; Social Justice Officer &amp; partner agencies</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>3. To encourage &amp; support the provision of a range of housing options &amp; designs that encourages, sustains &amp; enhances the diverse communities of the Mornington Peninsula.</p>	<p>To work with the Shire's Triple A Housing Committee &amp; other relevant bodies to develop strategic alliances to mitigate against homelessness in the community.</p> <p>That Council, where possible, explore partnership arrangements with Habitat for Humanity &amp; other similar organisations.</p>	<p>Triple A Housing Committee, Homelessness Working Group, Housing &amp; Social Justice Officer, together with other networks</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>4. To advocate &amp; lobby for more appropriate &amp; affordable housing on the Mornington Peninsula.</p>	<p>To establish a homelessness working group in partnership with other stakeholders in the Triple A Housing Committee to develop a strategic action plan to engage with State &amp; Federal governments &amp; seek funding where appropriate.</p> <p>To respond to the Federal &amp; State government housing affordability initiatives by:</p> <p>investigating the use of council land/properties for an affordable housing fund project in partnership with a community housing group or developer.</p> <p>investigating potential partnership with the community to develop a model that will form the basis of an application to Commonwealth Housing Affordability schemes in second round</p> <p>advocating to the state government to consider affordable housing development on Lot. 1, 185 -273 High street, Hastings (Warrigine connections site)</p>	<p>Triple A Housing Committee Homelessness Working Group, with Housing &amp; Social Justice Officer</p>	<p>Dec. 08 - Dec. 08 2<sup>nd</sup> rnd Mar./ Apr. 09 08</p>
<p>5. To facilitate the provision of housing information &amp; related services across the Mornington Peninsula.</p>	<p>To promote the findings of the homelessness report to the wider community &amp; relevant State &amp; Federal government departments to raise awareness of the complexity of the issues</p>	<p>Triple A Housing Committee Homelessness Working Group, with Housing &amp; Social Justice Officer &amp; Shire Communications Unit</p>	<p>From launch date - ongoing</p>

**MPS Action Plan on Homelessness 2008**

The action plan is linked to KEY OBJECTIVES previously adopted in the MPS Triple A Housing Strategy 2002.

# Last Word – The Conclusion

This report details some of the experiences of people who are homeless on the Mornington Peninsula, canvasses some of the causes of homelessness and explores the impact that homelessness has on health and well being. Homelessness compromises the health and well being of people who are homeless, those close to them, their advocates, and the broader community. It recognises that:

- People who are homeless are some of the most disadvantaged in our community;
- They are denied the basic human right of shelter;
- Their health and well being is often poor;
- They are often discriminated against and/or ignored; and
- The impacts of homelessness reach across the community.

Currently on the Mornington Peninsula, there is an acute lack of emergency accommodation, and more generally, a lack of affordable, available and appropriate housing. Many people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, are unable to find suitable secure housing options at any given time, but in more recent years with tighter housing markets, and less access to public housing, experience a prolonged and exacerbated state of homelessness.

People are forced to move on. They lose their place of belonging and all the health

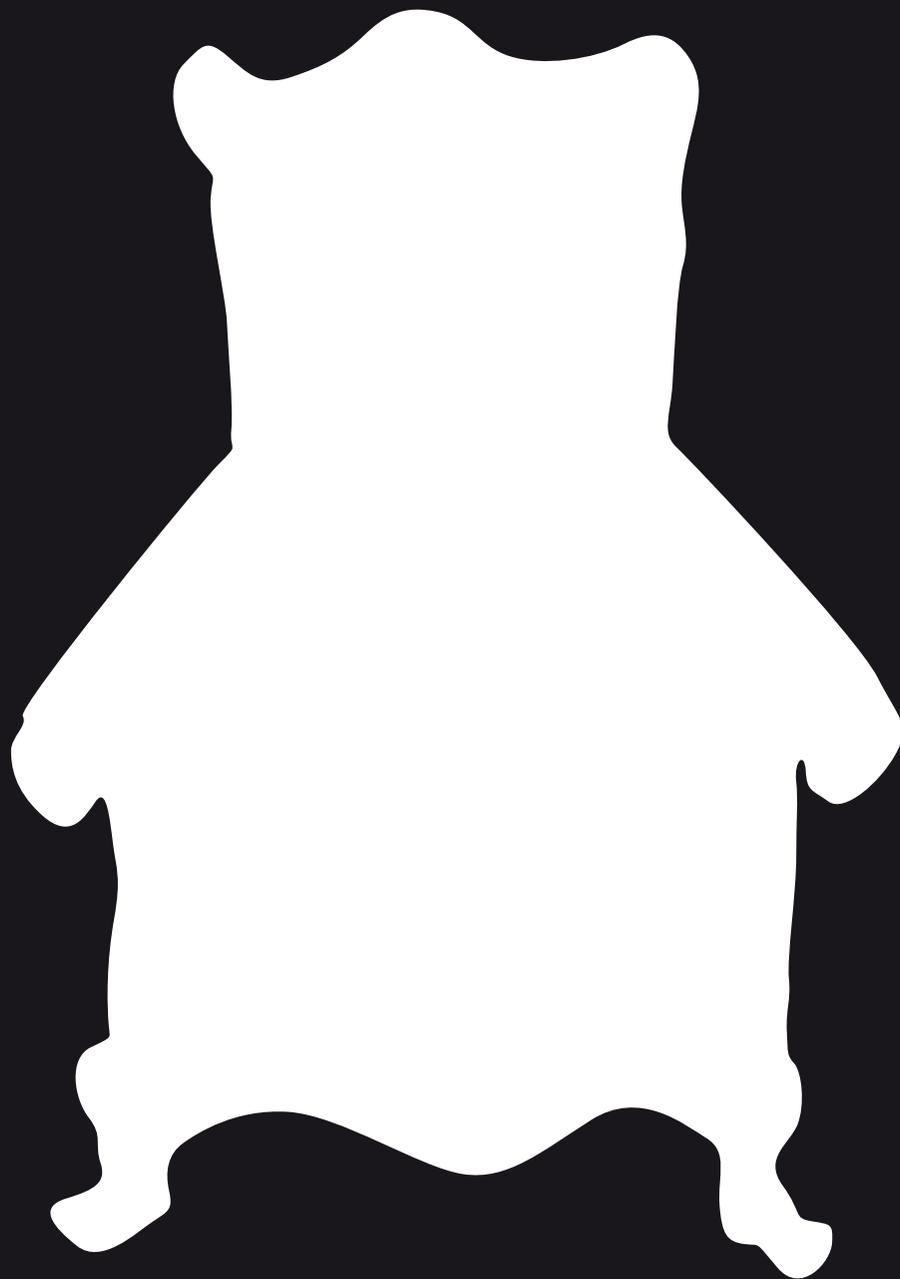
and well being benefits associated with this. Their families and friends experience a similar dislocation and separation. The workers charged with the responsibility of supporting people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, have to work with an inadequate and failing system. The professional and personal costs accompanying that wear down the health and well being of the workers involved.

It is time that we questioned ourselves and our society and faced the real cost of homelessness. It is not just the cost to the individual or the household that is homeless, it is the cost to the society in which we live, that accepts homelessness as inevitable in our community, and that fails to adequately address the issues. It calls into question our social structures and systems, our own moral standing, our level of compassion, and our own human rights; what right do we have to deny the other, the social and physical protection that we ourselves have identified as fundamental to life?

*“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and consequence and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood (sic).”*

(United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 1948)

Our responses to homelessness, then, deliver us our home truths.



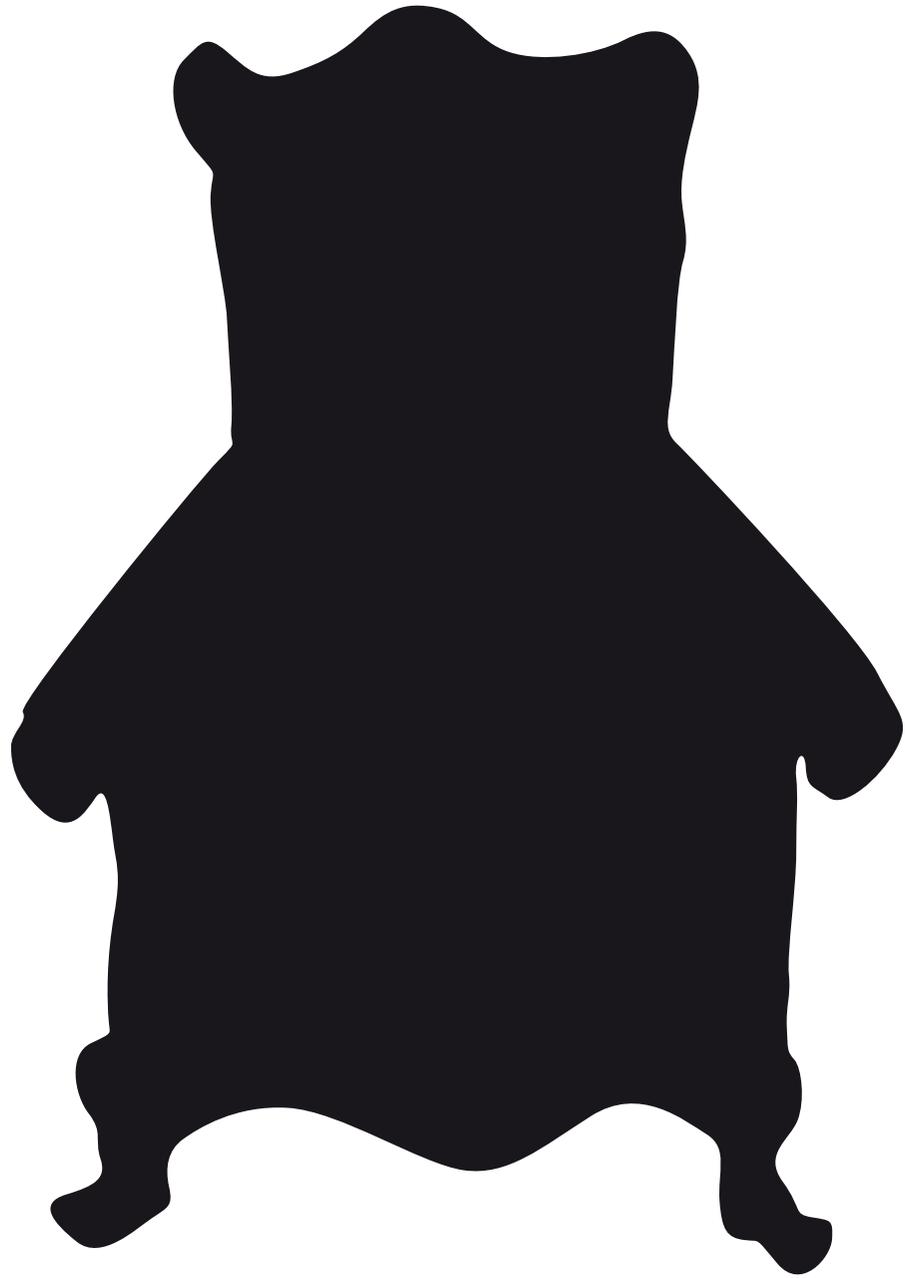




## PART 6 **MECHANICS**

*“I think that...that gets down to an issue of leadership, and despite pragmatism, that we have politicians and leaders within our society who are prepared to get up and say - well I actually don't really care what your views on this are, this is a matter of fundamental social justice, we are living in a developed country this is not a third world nation yet - this is a developed country. It is not acceptable that anyone within our society does not have shelter.”*

(WAYSS Ltd, Housing and Support Services, Community Consultation 2007)



# Methodology

Homelessness as an issue has generated a considerable amount of research literature, both qualitative and quantitative about the causes, impacts and solutions to homelessness. But even with this level of scrutiny and documentation, homelessness remains. People who are homeless are subjected to the daily grind of trying to survive without a home – a basic human right.

The task of this report was not just to add our voices and words to this vast library of information but to draw from its expertise, and with the local community, get a snap shot of homelessness on the Peninsula. Workers and community advocates across the Peninsula have always worked with the homeless and on housing issues. This report is part of that work, and is part of an ongoing commitment to continuing to work for better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness/housing insecurity on the Mornington Peninsula.

The Mornington Peninsula Triple A (Affordable, Appropriate and Available) Housing Committee initiated and supported this report, and is a testament to the Shire's commitment to working together with key stakeholders, in addressing the issue.

## INFORMATION FOR THIS REPORT WAS DRAWN FROM

### Community Consultations/ Interviews

A number of community consultations/ interviews were conducted with people experiencing homelessness and local service providers including:

### People who are Homeless

Five interviews with people who were homeless:

- Homeless young family
- Older woman living in insecure housing (caravan park)
- Older man camping
- Younger man, experiencing mental health issues, living with a friend
- Middle aged man, camping

Interviews were arranged through local community organisations. Consent was sort from all participants; all participants had the opportunity to withdraw their consent at any time. Although all interviews canvassed the same issues, the direction of the interview was to some degree directed by the participants and their experiences. All interviewees were paid. Apart from the family interview, all interviews were undertaken on a one to one basis. All names have been changed.

### Local Community Organisations/ Agencies/ Advocates

Group and individual interviews were conducted with a range of community organisations and individuals working with homeless people.

The following organisations participated in interviews:

- Southern Peninsula Community Support and Information Centre
- Vinnie's Kitchen Volunteers
- Anglicare, Rosebud
- S.H.A.R.P.S. (Southern Hepatitis/HIV/ AIDS Resource and Prevention Service), which is part of Peninsula Health
- Fusion Youth Housing, Mount Martha
- Peninsula Youth and Family Services ( Salvation Army), Rosebud
- WAYSS Ltd - Housing and Support Services, Dandenong
- WAYSS Ltd – Indigenous Housing Workers
- Mobile Integrated Health Team, Mornington – Peninsula Community Health Centre
- The Hastings Centre, Hastings
- Mornington Peninsula Domestic Violence Service (Good Shepherd, Hastings)

### Mornington Peninsula Shire

- Youth Workers
- Rangers
- Indigenous Workers
- Social Planning and Community Development team

### Government Agencies

The following provided information for the report:

- Office of Housing, Frankston;
- Department of Human Services, Dandenong.

### Community and Government Reports

Community and government reports from across Australia and overseas have been used to explore the issue.

### Census Data

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006  
Census data and analysis provided by i.d. solutions has been used within the report.

# Appendix

Data and research on homelessness – strengths and limitations  
Our understanding and evaluation of homelessness and its risks relies on two main sources:

- The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census of Population and Housing collected every five years;
- The National Data Collection from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) which collects information on people who use services funded under Australia's largest homelessness funding program.

While these sources are robust by international standards they do not capture the wider, dynamic picture of homelessness or vulnerability to homelessness over time.

The ABS Census has been collecting information on homelessness since 1996, and is continuing to improve the methodology and accuracy of its reporting. People experiencing homelessness may spend time in boarding houses, nights on the street, nights with friends or relatives, and nights in crisis shelters. It is hard to find and count people in most of these settings.

The Census can only tell us how many people are homeless on Census night. It does not tell us how many people

are homeless across the year, nor how long or often people are homeless.

Full analysis of information about the homeless population from the 2006 Census will be available later in 2008.

Similarly, the SAAP data collection is improving. SAAP data, however, can only tell us about people who sought assistance from a funded service provider. It misses the many thousands who did not approach a SAAP service, those who use mainstream services, or people who receive a service from one of the smaller homelessness programs.

With these limitations in mind, we have used the most comprehensive information available. This means using SAAP data to augment ABS data to analyse the experience and causes of homelessness.

Other institutions and organisations carry out research on homelessness. Service providers, for example, hold small but richly detailed data sets about homelessness. SAAP has its own research funds, which are primarily dedicated to projects related to SAAP clients and the SAAP service system. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute has undertaken a small number of research projects in this area, particularly in relation to housing outcomes.

In 2007, a national homelessness research seminar was held to explore ways of developing a more comprehensive national research agenda. The national homelessness research seminar was conducted by the Council of Homeless Persons, Victoria, and funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Coordination and Development Committee. The seminar came up with the idea to establish a national network to better coordinate research efforts.

(Commonwealth of Australia: Which Way Home? A new approach to homelessness, May 2008)



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