



## Frequently asked Questions Melbourne Street to Home (MS2H)

### **1. What is Street to Home and how does it work?**

Street to Home is an exciting new approach to housing and support that has ended homelessness permanently for thousands of people internationally and interstate. The program identifies and houses the most vulnerable rough sleepers: those who have been homeless the longest, have the most disabling conditions, and are least likely to access housing resources. These individuals typically spend years cycling between emergency shelters, hospitals, and jails. Once housed, the former rough sleepers are connected with services that help them get back on their feet and participate in their own rehabilitation. Street to Home works because people are provided with fast access to good quality housing together with ongoing, individually tailored support to help them sustain their tenancies for life.

### **2. Who is running Melbourne Street to Home (MS2H)?**

MS2H is a collaboration between HomeGround Services, Salvation Army Adult Services, Salvation Army Crisis Services and the Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program. It has been funded until June 2013 through the Victorian Department of Human Services, Housing and Community Building division as one component of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. Similar Street to Home programs are already underway in Adelaide, Brisbane, Sydney, Fremantle and Canberra.

### **3. What does the program hope to achieve?**

MS2H and the Street to Home projects in other Australian cities are a key strategy for achieving the national target of halving rough sleeping by 2013 and for offering all people who are sleeping rough accommodation by 2020.

The MS2H program is based on three fundamentals being delivered in an integrated package: assertive outreach, health care and rapid access to permanent housing. There will be substantial research on MS2H that will define and evaluate the outcomes, but it is expected that the number of people able to achieve and sustain suitable long term housing will be the main indicator of success.

#### **4. What geographical area does MS2H cover?**

Melbourne CBD, inner south, inner north and inner west. There is an intention to extend to other parts of Melbourne and to regional Victoria once the program is well established in the inner city.

#### **5. I have heard about something called Registry Week. What is Registry Week, and how does it link to MS2H?**

In October 2010, Melbourne Street to Home conducted an extensive early-morning outreach exercise known as Registry Week to locate and identify as many rough sleepers in the inner-city as possible. All rough sleepers were asked to complete the Vulnerability Index, an interview based assessment tool designed to determine those who were most vulnerable and unwell. The Vulnerability Index data collected during Registry Week was used to establish a Vulnerability Register that records the details - including health and housing needs - of rough sleepers who require assistance,

The 50 rough sleepers who were identified via the Vulnerability Index as the most vulnerable in inner Melbourne were then selected for intensive follow-up through the Melbourne Street to Home program, ensuring that those who were most in need received help first.

Registry Week will be repeated annually to ensure Melbourne Street to Home has accurate and up-to-date information about the nature and extent of rough sleeping in Melbourne.

#### **6. The City of Melbourne also conducts an annual count of people sleeping rough, so why repeat it?**

They are actually different processes. The Street Count conducted by the City of Melbourne, like the five-yearly Australian Bureau of Statistics Census counts, seeks to understand the numbers and some characteristics of people who are sleeping rough.

Registry Week is not simply a survey. The MS2H Registry Week process gathers as completely as possible the names, housing and health histories of people sleeping rough in the catchment in order to place them on a Vulnerability Register and prioritise those who are most unwell for intensive follow-up through assertive outreach by teams of housing support and health workers.

While the Census and Council processes are important for research and planning purposes, the MS2H process is the beginning of purposively targeted service delivery. It is in effect a "guarantee of service" through identifying people and undertaking to work with the most

vulnerable and to refer and/or place on the MS2H waiting list all the other people found to need assistance from the homelessness sector.

## **7. What happened during Registry Week?**

Teams of trained volunteers combed the streets of inner Melbourne on three consecutive mornings between 4.00 AM and 7.00 AM to find and survey people who were sleeping rough. Each team consisted of 4-5 volunteers under the direction of an experienced homelessness practitioner from HomeGround, the Salvation Army or a local service provider already working with the area's rough sleepers. Volunteers were recruited from the homelessness and allied sectors to ensure that they had the necessary skills to engage effectively with rough sleepers.

Team members woke up people who were asleep and asked their permission to survey them. At the end of the interview, they asked permission to photograph the person so that MS2H could more readily identify them again. All rough sleepers were informed that they were free to refuse to be interviewed at all, to refuse to answer certain questions or refuse to be photographed. Everyone who participated received a small cash gift to thank them for their time.

## **8. Is it really necessary to wake people up at 4 AM to interview them?**

The aim of a Registry Week is to obtain a full list of all the people who sleep rough in the area, and we know that some of the most vulnerable people avoid seeking assistance. Early morning has been found to be the best time to make contact with all rough sleepers. During the 2010 Registry Week we supplemented these morning rounds with visits to food vans, meal programs and other drop in services to achieve as complete a list as possible of rough sleepers.

## **9. Is it ethical to take a person's photograph when they are homeless?**

Taking people's photographs for the purpose of future identification is an unusual practice in Australian homelessness service delivery, but it is not unheard of. In fact with some client groups, particularly those who are extremely unwell, highly transient, or frail aged with mental or cognitive disabilities, it is a responsible way to uphold a duty of care to people whose wellbeing, safety and access to the services they need requires active engagement and follow-up by workers.

During Registry Week MS2H asked each person for their express permission to take their photographs, and clearly explained the reason for this request. The US and Brisbane programs also sought permission to use photographs for media purposes, which some people were happy to agree to, but MS2H has decided against this practice during this first Registry Week.

## **10. What did Melbourne Street to Home learn about Melbourne's rough sleeper population during Registry Week?**

Over the course of the three days the Vulnerability Index was administered, 170 people were surveyed. Of these 170, 51% were assessed as being vulnerable.

The average age of the non-vulnerable participants was 38, while the vulnerable population was slightly older with an average age of 44 years. The average length of time the non-vulnerable people had been homeless was 6 years. The average time for the vulnerable was 11 years. Of the total number, 11% were women and 13% were Indigenous.

Of the 170 rough sleepers surveyed, 61% reported or displayed indicators of a serious medical condition, 52% reported or displayed indicators of mental illness, and 74% reported or displayed indicators of substance abuse.

For more information about the results obtained from the 2010 Registry Week, see the *Bulletin: Melbourne Street to Home Registry Week* information sheet.

## **11. How is the Vulnerability Index scored?**

There are 8 key factors scored:

*At Risk Qualifiers:*

More than six months on the streets and at least one of the following:

1. Tri-morbidity (a combination of at least one from each category below) (+1)
2. More than 3 hospitalizations or ER visits over a year (+1)
3. More than 3 Emergency Room visits in the past three months (+1)
4. 60 years or more of age (+1)
5. HIV+/AIDS (+1)
6. Kidney Disease / ESRD or Dialysis (+1)
7. Liver Disease / HEP C / Cirrhosis / End stage liver disease (+1)
8. Cold weather injuries (frostbite, immersion foot, hypothermia) (+1)

*Tri- Morbidity*

- Mental Health + Serious Medical Condition + Substance Abuse
- Client must have at least one condition in each of these areas to qualify for tri-morbidity

Questions that qualify in each area:

*Mental Health Qualifiers:*

- Being treated / receiving counselling for mental health issues
- Taken to the hospital against your will for mental health reasons
- Observed signs or symptoms of Mental Illness

### *Serious Medical Condition Qualifiers:*

- Kidney Disease / ESRD or Dialysis
- Liver Disease / HEP C / Cirrhosis / End stage liver disease
- Heart Disease/ arrhythmia/ irregular heartbeat
- HIV+ / AIDS
- Emphysema
- Diabetes
- Asthma
- Cancer
- Hepatitis C
- Tested Positive for TB
- Observed signs or symptoms of serious physical health condition

### *Substance Abuse Qualifiers:*

- Ever abused alcohol or drugs, or told you do
- HX of injection drugs
- Has been treated for alcohol or drug abuse
- Consumed alcohol everyday for the last 30 days
- Observed signs or symptoms of alcohol or substance abuse

## **12. What about young people and families who are sleeping rough? What does “vulnerable” mean in the context of people who sleep rough?**

The critical vulnerability factors are participant’s physical and mental health condition. The most unwell people who have been homeless for the longest time will be assigned the highest Vulnerability Index scores. This is based on the idea that the sickest people need to be assisted first. As such, the Index will not screen in most people who are new to sleeping rough, even though they are certainly at risk of harm. Rather, MS2H will seek good referrals for these people into other suitable homelessness assistance programs that offer services more appropriate to each individual case.

## **13. How is MS2H using the Vulnerability Register?**

The Vulnerability Register has already been used to identify the first intake of clients for the MS2H team to work with, based on their vulnerability ratings. As further vacancies become available, it will also act as a source of new clients for the program.

The Vulnerability Register is also being used to provide assistance with housing applications and referral to other services for rough sleepers who did not qualify for ongoing Melbourne Street to Home support.

**14. Who owns the Vulnerability Register data and who can see it?**

The partner agencies are able to view and update the entries on the Register. With permission from the person concerned, other agencies are also able to view records for the purpose of co-service delivery. Common Ground in the US will be able to use de-identified data from Melbourne for research purposes, as will RMIT for the program evaluation.

**15. How many people is MS2H working with now?**

The Melbourne Street to Home team is currently working with 54 vulnerable rough sleepers identified during the 2010 Registry Week. Our target is 100 people annually, for an average support period of 12 months.

**16. Where is the housing coming from?**

MS2H has a small housing options team who are working hard to source housing association, transitional housing, public housing and private rental options to back up the program.

In the first four months of the program, ten MS2H clients have moved into stable, independent housing. A further nine clients have moved off the streets into shared or temporary accommodation while the MS2H team continues to source more appropriate options.

**17. What will happen with people that my agency is working with if they are selected for Melbourne Street to Home?**

MS2H has sought permission from clients to contact the agencies with which they are already involved. Depending on the outcome of each of these negotiations, MS2H may work with the person as the primary agency or as a back up for housing and health advice, or just arrange to be contacted if required.



## **18. Why import an American model into Australia?**

The US 100,000 Homes campaign and the associated notions of Ending Homelessness and Housing First are powerful, well grounded concepts that we believe offer a fresh way of thinking about a very tough problem faced by every country. Australia, like every other country, has always adopted and adapted international ideas when they seem relevant to a local situation. MS2H are doing further work to make sure the Street to Home approach is specifically and continually adapted to reflect the reality of rough sleeping in Melbourne. MS2H recognises that when it comes to primary homelessness in Melbourne and Victoria, there is much to learn, and much to do. MS2H seeks to introduce a new but complementary service approach to housing rough sleepers and keeping them housed. That local people didn't think of it first seems a very poor reason to ignore a good idea.

### **For further information:**

Contact Sally Regan, HomeGround Services, 0448 816 458 and Glenn James, The Salvation Army Adult Services, 0418 138 522

Website: <http://www.homeground.org.au/case-studies/streettohome>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/MS2HFB>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/MS2H>