

Bulletin 2: Progress and Challenges March 2011

Introduction

It is four months since the Melbourne Street to Home program's first Registry Week. During Registry Week 2010, volunteers found and interviewed 170 chronically homeless people sleeping rough in inner-city Melbourne. Of this 170, 51% were found to be vulnerable – that is, likely to die within the next five years if they did not find housing and receive support.

The program is still developing and growing. We have recruited 42 of the most vulnerable people identified during Registry Week to the program and been closely engaging with them.

Three people have already been permanently housed and are receiving support and in their cases the success of the program is startling. Despite these successes the program is faced with the significant challenge of finding safe, affordable, permanent housing for the other clients engaged in the program.

This is the second Melbourne Street to Home bulletin. The first bulletin was published in December 2010 and covered in detail the results of Registry Week. That bulletin can be viewed [here](#).

Progress

The program's service delivery is still in its initial stages. It has at times been a lengthy process to find and reconnect with individuals first identified during Registry Week. Melbourne Street to Home workers have now reconnected with 42 people in the initial group of 50 who were identified as the most vulnerable people during Registry Week. Work is continuing to locate the other eight people.

Stella's story*

Stella is a 43-year-old Indigenous woman who has slept rough and lived in rooming houses and crisis accommodation on and off for 10 years. She faces significant health challenges including drug and alcohol use, chronic liver disease and hepatitis C. She has a history of begging, received little other support and rarely accessed city-based services or food vans.

Stella completed the Vulnerability Index during Melbourne Street to Home Registry Week. Her needs were significant enough that she was included in the first group of 50 people to be engaged in the program.

Despite being identified as a target for assertive outreach she was difficult to find. A month had passed without workers being able to find her and it was by chance encounter that a worker recognised her from the photo taken during Registry Week and was able to reconnect with her and begin working.

Stella has now been housed permanently in her own apartment. It is the first time she has had a place of her own. From this stable base she is working with health and mental health services and has linked back in with her specialist. She is participating in an art group. Her Melbourne Street to Home worker continues to work with her to ensure she has the support she needs.

* Name has been changed

Three of this initial group have now been permanently housed – one in public housing and two in supportive housing. The positive outcomes of permanent housing and appropriate support for this group are evident. A worker wrote of one of his recently-housed clients: "he was almost unrecognisable from the man I first met last October. He was healthy, stress free and he spoke about the future and how much he was looking forward to it."

An additional 15 people have been temporarily housed in transitional housing, SAAP crisis accommodation and supported residential care. Six of these people are temporarily housed in private or community rooming houses. Although these people are off the street, better, more sustainable housing options are required.

Ongoing support and engagement is being provided to the whole group, whether or not they have obtained housing. Mental health problems, legal issues, financial issues, physical health issues and independent living skills are key areas being addressed by workers to help people recover from the trauma of chronic homelessness and living on the streets.

As the program develops workers are learning about the best ways to engage with chronically homeless clients. A service manual is being developed to capture the expanding experience of workers.

At the moment Melbourne Street to Home is dealing with an initial group of 50 people. The program is not yet taking referrals from agencies but it is hoped that it can expand to accommodate referrals in the future.

Challenges

Although the outcomes for those who have been permanently housed are heartening, access to safe, affordable, permanent housing for the clients we are working with remains a continuing challenge.

Due to a complex application system, long waiting lists and the transitional housing system, direct access to permanent housing for this client group is incredibly difficult. Many of the people interviewed during Registry Week are not currently on the public housing waiting list. Program partners are calling for changes to the process for allocating public and community housing to ensure that those chronically homeless people who are closest to death can access permanent housing quickly.

There is new Nation Building housing stock that has already been paid for and more properties are being completed every day. To date, none of this housing has been put aside for the vulnerable rough sleepers that Melbourne Street to Home has identified.

Program partners are calling on the Victorian Government to show leadership and unlock access to housing for people who are currently sleeping rough. This will not only save a unnecessary human suffering, but it will also reduce the strain on emergency health, mental health, justice and housing systems, potentially saving millions of tax payers' dollars.

It is this housing that is going to lead to the impressive outcomes that have been seen in other cities in Australia and internationally. In Brisbane, for example, Micah Projects has permanently housed 69 people since June 2010 using the Street to Home approach.

Several people have been incarcerated since Registry Week and one person has passed away before they could move into good housing, illustrating how urgently permanent housing and appropriate support are needed for this group.

Parity launch and Street to Home forum

On 8 March Melbourne Street to Home partners, supporters and organisations involved in Street to Home in other states, gathered to launch a new edition of *Parity* at a forum hosted by the Council to Homeless Persons. Victorian Housing Minister, the Hon. Wendy Lovell MLC, officially launched the edition and spoke about the complexity of homelessness and housing issues in the state. She said she hoped to see a reduction in homelessness and public housing waiting lists as Melbourne Street to Home and other White Paper initiatives move forward.

Other speakers shared their varied experiences of Street to Home programs around Australia. Stephen Nash of HomeGround Services spoke about the hopes for Street to Home in Melbourne and the history of the approach. Felicity Reynolds of Mercy Foundation in Sydney covered the importance of the Housing First approach in Street to Home programs. Scott Kerdel, of the Street to Home Service in Adelaide, spoke about the experiences of Australia's longest running and most established Street to Home program. Guy Johnson, Jo Baulderstone and Cameron Parsell shared their planned research into Street to Home programs. A number of these presentations are now available as videos online.

Forum presentations

[Stephen Nash, HomeGround Services](#)

[Felicity Reynolds, Mercy Foundation](#)

[Scott Kerdel, Street to Home SA](#)



Housing Minister Wendy Lovell officially launches the Street to Home edition of Parity.



Felicity Reynolds of Sydney's Mercy Foundation discusses the Housing First approach.



Stephen Nash of HomeGround Services presents on the background to the Street to Home approach.



Research and evaluation

The evaluation of Melbourne Street to Home, led by Dr Guy Johnson of RMIT with Prof. Chris Chamberlain and Sharon Andrews, is already underway.

The longitudinal study, which aims to assess the long-term impact of the program, will interview all clients who come into the program and re-interview them, and any new clients, over a two year period. The first 'baseline' interviews are already underway. The interviews will cover housing status and stability, health and social connectedness of participants in the program. This research is jointly funded by FAHCSIA, HomeGround and the Salvation Army.

The first research findings are due in October. They will be based on client interviews and describe the characteristics of the chronically homeless group that Melbourne Street to Home is engaging with.

More information

Resources

[Melbourne Street to Home webpage](#)

[Melbourne Street to Home Bulletin 1](#)

[Street to Home edition of Parity](#)

Media

"Pre-dawn survey sheds light on city's hundreds of homeless", *The Age*, 9 February 2011

Social Media

[Melbourne Street to Home Facebook](#)

[Melbourne Street to Home Twitter](#)

Partners

[HomeGround Services](#)

[Salvation Army Adult Services](#)

[Salvation Army Crisis Services](#)

[Royal District Nursing Service Homeless Persons Program](#)

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