The Role of Community Development in Responding to Homelessness
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Council to Homeless Persons
Jenny Smith Chief Executive Officer
Kate Calvin Manager — Policy and Communications
Ian Gough Manager — Consumer Programs
Lynette Deakes Office Manager
Noel Murray Publications Coordinator, Parity Editor
Laine Harris and Catherine McGauran Media and Communications Officers
Angela Kyriakopoulos HAS Coordinator
Cassandra Bawden Peer Education and Support Program Team Leader
Trish Westmore Capacity Building and Policy Officer
Leonie Kenny Service Coordination Project Manager
Akke Halma Bookkeeper
Address 2 Stanley Street Collingwood Melbourne VIC 3066
Phone (03) 8415 6200
Fax (03) 9419 7445
E-mail parity@chp.org.au
Website www.chp.org.au

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November: Responding to Homelessness in NSW

Cover artwork
Tatlin's Tower — The Monument to the Future that Never Was.
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Foreword

The Role of Community Development in Responding to Homelessness

In recent months Melbourne, and Victoria has seen a huge increase in the number of people sleeping rough. It has also seen the Andrews Government, communities and essential support services band together to help those experiencing homelessness seek refuge and access essential supports including healthcare, mental health treatment and drug and alcohol counselling.

We are working to end homelessness — to do this we need to work in partnership. The Government will continue to advocate to the Federal Government to reinstate the rough sleeping target and to work with us to provide coordinated and targeted support.

There is no simple solution to homelessness, or easy way to ensure every Victorian has a safe place to call home. It has been inspiring to see best-practice in community development based responses to homelessness from all across Australia showcased in this edition. I hope that these contributions are something that we, as a community, can learn from to make real changes and help people experiencing homelessness in Victoria.

Martin Foley
Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing
Whose Community?
Rough sleeping is increasing dramatically. While we will have to wait some time for data from the imminent 2016 Census, we know already from recent Street Counts in some of our capital cities, that there is an alarming increase in the numbers of people sleeping rough.

A walk through the CBDs of Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide confirms this trend before our eyes. And it’s not just in our cities. An ABC news report in late July argued that the greatest numbers of rough sleepers are in fact in rural and regional Australia.

In recent years, media coverage of homelessness has been generally sympathetic. However, we are now seeing a trend, particularly in tabloid media, of stories demonising those sleeping rough. The narrative has shifted to focus on rough sleeping and concerns, not for the safety of those experiencing homelessness, but of those passing by.

This type of media coverage is highly divisive; encouraging fear and resentment towards people who are homeless. It has concrete consequences. Following these stories, rough sleepers have reported being the subject of increased verbal and even physical abuse from passers-by and local governments have reported an increase in vehement complaints about rough sleeping and calls for people’s forcible “removal” from the streets.

These kinds of responses to the reality of homelessness, not only question the sort of community in which we live, but also pose the fundamental question of whose community is it? Do we have a community that is inclusive of people experiencing homelessness, in which they are part of the ‘us’ or one from which they are excluded — where people without a home become ‘them’; outsiders to be feared, or reviled?

This process of ‘blaming the victim’ and ‘othering’ is nothing new in social policy or practice. It is deeply troubling, as it tends to occur alongside policies and practices targeting the excluded group; policies that would never gain acceptance if levelled at those considered part of the ‘us’.

This partnering of narratives that demonise and exclude, with policies and practices that punish and further victimise people who are marginalised, highlights why both story-telling and community development are so important.

To develop the policies we need to end homelessness, we must understand those of us who experience it, as part of not separate from, our shared community.

This edition of Parity highlights the vital role played by those working at the level of local communities to prevent and alleviate the social exclusion of those experiencing homelessness. This local work complements the policies and services designed to provide the housing and support necessary to end homelessness.

We need governments to adopt an effective and coordinated set of plans to make sure there is housing affordable to all, with appropriate support when needed. The work at the community level is crucial to building the shared narratives, and community attitudes we need, for governments to take the actions required to end homelessness.

Acknowledgements
The Council to Homeless Persons would like to thank the organisations that provided the sponsorship support that made this edition possible: the Cities of Port Phillip, Greater Geelong, Melbourne, Darebin and Stonnington.

Hope Street Youth and Family Services also supported the production of this edition. Their support for the work of the Council to Homeless Persons and Parity is very much appreciated.
The Role of Community Development in Responding to Homelessness

Philip Mendes, Director of the Social Inclusion and Social Policy Unit, Department of Social Work, Monash University*

Community and community development are contested terms which can potentially refer to either conservative or progressive strategies and objectives. The term community is often used to depict the prevalence of social cohesion and harmony within united and homogeneous groups utilising processes of social trust and cooperation for the common good. But in reality, communities are often divided by class, ethnicity, race, gender and other significant social, economic and attitudinal barriers. Stronger community cohesion for the majority may sometimes mean excluding a disliked minority. Edgar1 calls this ‘negative local tribalism’, and warns that community control of services and resources can lead to discrimination against those defined as outsiders or undeserving.

In an earlier article,2 I noted that the ambiguous and often contradictory meaning of terms such as community and community development was particularly reflected in the Victorian illicit drugs debate. Some local governments and lobby groups pursued a socially inclusive approach to drug users and their families. But some local communities influenced by Nimbyism (Not in My Backyard) sought to marginalise and exclude drug users. Their preference was to deny the existence of the social problem, or to divert it elsewhere. In a further article,3 I similarly noted that while some residents of the City of Port Phillip defended the inclusion of street sex workers in their locality, other resident groups wanted to exclude them from the community.

Local academics Bryson and Mowbray4 famously warned that community was employed as a ‘motherhood’ term to ‘mystify’ social issues. They noted that community was increasingly added as a prefix to social programs in order to suggest a progressive or participatory emphasis. But in practice, the term was consistently defined in a vague and ineffective manner. Bryson and Mowbray concluded that, if anything, community was serving a conservative political agenda by blurring the real structural causes of social problems in capitalist society, and reinforcing existing social and economic inequities.

Community development refers to the employment of community structures to address social needs and empower groups of people to determine their own destiny. A community development approach to a social problem such as poverty or unemployment would involve engaging with community members who were poor or unemployed, consulting with those community organisations that are involved with and have knowledge of the experiences of disadvantaged groups, and ensuring that the local community per se plays a key role in both defining the causes of the problem, and identifying potential policy solutions.

Key community development principles are social inclusion, diversity, empowerment and participation. Social inclusion refers to the notion that policy development processes should always seek to include rather than to exclude; that all members of a community should be valued even if they hold conflicting views; and that we should respect and value others even when we disagree with their ideas, values, and politics.

Similarly, diversity emphasises the celebration of differences within the community. Particular care should be taken to encourage and validate groups traditionally excluded such as gays and lesbians, people with disabilities, and racial or ethnic minorities. Empowerment involves providing people with the skills and resources necessary to increase their capacity to determine their own future, and to effectively participate in the life of their community.

Participation refers to the right of community members to directly participate in the identification of social problems, and in determining strategies for their resolution. It is important to ensure that all sections of a community including potentially marginalised groups are able to participate in the development and implementation of policy strategies.5

But in practice, community development can be used within a variety of ideological frames for a broad range of purposes, and many so-called community development programs do not follow CD principles. Some programs further pathologise excluded groups by targeting changes in individual behaviour, rather than identifying broader community and structural policy reforms.

An example of this might be policies which simply aimed to reduce the number of drug users or street sex workers or homeless people in a particular neighbourhood, rather than introducing strategies that improved outcomes for all community members including those involved in drug use or sex work. Similarly, programs may potentially blame the deficits of the local community for social problems such as drug use or unemployment or homelessness, rather than identifying broader structural factors which go beyond locality such as inadequate funding of rehabilitation facilities for substance users, a lack of affordable
housing, or low levels of business and government investment in employment-generating industries.

The failure to apply key community development principles was particularly apparent in the introduction of place-based income management (IM) programs by the Commonwealth Government. Application of a bottom-up approach to policy development and delivery would have enabled a range of local community stakeholders including service users, community welfare organisations, and representatives of Indigenous organisations to consider how and why IM measures might complement existing community services in order to benefit income security recipients and the local community more generally.

But our study of the trial site of Shepparton found that this potential was mostly ignored. Both the implementation and evaluation processes involved centralised policies being imposed top-down by distant politicians and bureaucrats on a particular location. There is little evidence that the introduction of IM in Shepparton utilised local knowledge and expertise regarding the causes of, and potential solutions to, social disadvantage. Little if any contact was made with existing local networks of service providers. No attention was given to research evidence confirming the efficacy of place-based programs based on community development principles. Instead, IM in Shepparton merely involved the introduction of stigmatising programs focused narrowly on the individual behaviour of income security recipients in a particular location."Community Development and the Homeless"

This leads us to the homeless. There has been some conjecture as to whether homeless people form a community given the heterogeneous nature of the population, and the diverse range of individual and structural factors including experiences of child abuse and out-of-home care, family violence, unemployment, drug and alcohol use, mental illness, and lack of affordable housing or support services that may contribute to homelessness. But many people experiencing homelessness do seem to share a common identity and similar policy concerns as reflected in recent collective protests in the City Square.

So what would the application of a community development framework to homelessness programs involve? It would certainly not be a top-down process where the government designs and implements a program which is imposed on the homeless population. Rather, it would be bottom-up, and ensure the active participation of homeless people in the planning of new services, the development of key practices and policies, and the evaluation of their effectiveness.

Firstly, any plans for new program initiatives affecting the homeless should include extensive consultations with homeless people to discuss how and in what way these measures might benefit their population. This planning process should also include discussion with representatives of homelessness advocacy groups, key service provider agencies and local government within that geographical area.

Secondly, if there was agreement that these measures might benefit some or most homeless people, there would also need to be extensive consultation as to how they would complement existing services and supports that were known to be effectively assisting these groups of people.

And finally, extensive consultations with homeless people, homelessness advocates and service providers would be incorporated as key components of the planned evaluation framework in order to determine whether or not the new programs actually lead to better outcomes for the homeless population and the local community as a whole.

Endnotes

* Associate Professor Philip Mendes is the Director of the Social Inclusion and Social Policy Unit in the Department of Social Work at Monash University. His latest books include Young people transitioning from out-of-home care: International research, policy and practice (Palgrave Macmillan, Sept 2016), and Australia’s Welfare Wars 3rd edition (New South Press, late 2016): philip.mendes@monash.edu
’Being homeless is very unhappy, you don’t feel part of society and you can’t enjoy the pleasures of life’

Community development approaches have a number of key principles in common — at their core is the belief in people’s ability and need to connect and achieve change collectively. A community and participatory action approach aims to facilitate members of the community being involved to generate mutual understandings by having multiple conversations and then together, through these relationships, identify shared needs and implement agreed actions. It recognises the multidimensional attachment by people to places and ultimately to one another. Local government is the tier of government specifically mandated to work at this level:

’The primary objective of a Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions, including improving the overall quality of life of people in the local community.’

The City of Port Phillip understands that homelessness has a major impact on feelings of belonging inclusion and isolation — individually and socially. Homelessness is understood to encompass both individual and structural drivers and so Council has actively taken a multi-dimensional approach to identifying the different roles it can have in a range of polices, partnerships and funding agreements.

By utilising an overall community development approach, Council seeks to tap into the knowledge, resilience and capacity of all members of the community. It seeks to ensure that services and responses are available to be delivered to people when they are most vulnerable, as well as services and projects that are developed by and with people who experience or have experienced homelessness:

’the most important thing is building relationships, building social connections as these allow social inclusion. Social interaction leads to engagement that often sees participants achieve well beyond their expectations and can be transformational.’

The five year Social Inclusion Project (SIP) based at the City of Port Phillip (2008–2013) that was jointly funded by the Victorian Government and Council incorporated the development of local leadership and capacity training. Following this initial training, two further leadership courses have continued locally: Our Voices (Port Phillip Community Group — 2014–2016) and Voices of the South Side (Port Melbourne Neighbourhood House — 2015–2017).

Working with the participants of these courses, as well as members of Council to Homeless Persons’ Peer Education Support Program, has enabled Council to tap in to the expertise of local residents, who have developed their skills and confidence, as well as to have access to the lived experience of homelessness. These participants are then able to be employed in our community development projects in varied roles such as planning and advisory panels, community research and consultation facilitation.

Community development projects have frequently involved event focused working groups and the ongoing engagement with networks of which Council is a member. These form part of a community coalition of partners and community members to produce:

• The Annual Homeless Memorial — an event that is held each June on or near the Winter Solstice in a park setting to remember people who have died due to being homeless. Held each year since 2001 and coordinated by the Inner South Community Health Community Connection Program, local Port Phillip residents who have a lived experience of homelessness plan and implement the event with music and presentations by people who have been or are still experiencing homelessness.
• National Homelessness Week event and displays — coordinated by the Inner South Rooming House Network and held in August each year, a range of activities and events are organised with people who have been homeless to expand the broader community’s understanding of homelessness.
• Understanding Homelessness training — since 2010, members of the Council to Homeless Persons’ Peer Education Support Program have delivered an annual staff training session at the City of Port Phillip as part of our staff’s learning and development program.
• Census Homeless enumeration coordination in 2001, 2006, 2011 and in August this year, Council officers will be working in partnership with community organisations, community members with a lived experience of homelessness, volunteer groups and health services to ensure an accurate picture of the numbers of people experiencing homelessness is obtained from
across the Inner South region of Melbourne.
• Pilot Homelessness Advisory Group 2016–2017 — consumer representatives will be sought to assist with development of the next Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan and implementation of year three actions of the Homelessness Action Strategy starting with a consultation forum in November 2016.

The City of Port Phillip actively seeks to pursue social justice for all of the people within the community through the application of six principles: participation, respect for diversity, reducing disadvantage, partnership, access and addressing the cost of living.

‘A respectful community is one where difference is understood, sought after and celebrated, where all people are valued for their individuality and feel free to be themselves. The City of Port Phillip commits to ensuring respect for all members of the community.’

The City of Port Phillip’s Think and Act Homelessness Action Strategy 2015–2020 sits within Council’s Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan which recognises that:

‘a broad range of social, economic and environmental factors need to be considered to improve health. Factors such as shelter, income, education, environment, social connection, access to services and equity have direct impacts on health, and also influence a person’s ability to improve their own health and wellbeing.’

Council’s approach seeks to increase community strength both through these policies, participatory action research and community education projects and by also structural supply responses addressing the critical lack of safe and affordable housing as evident in Council’s housing policy — In our backyard: Growing Affordable Housing in Port Phillip 2015–2025.

‘Affordable housing is vital to maintaining social inclusion, equity and tolerance. Council recognises the importance of maintaining a socially diverse and inclusive community, and that appropriate housing is important to maintain the health and wellbeing of our residents.’

This focus is underpinned by evidenced based research regarding the benefits of building community cohesion and strength. According to Alan Black and Philip Hughes:

‘the extent to which resources and processes within a community maintain and enhance both individual and collective wellbeing in ways consistent with the principles of equity, comprehensiveness, participation, self-reliance and social responsibility. This definition implies that an assessment of community strength involves taking account of resources, processes and outcomes. These are dynamically interrelated and there are feedback loops from outcomes to resources and processes. Most people identify with and participate in a mosaic of geographical communities and communities of interest.

In most instances, individual and collective wellbeing is enhanced through this variety of communities. While it may sometimes be appropriate to look at how a particular community is enhancing individual and collective wellbeing, it may be more appropriate in other instances to look at the extent to which wellbeing is enhanced through this mosaic of communities.’

Many of the local community housing organisations grew out of initiatives led by local community groups across Port Phillip and across Melbourne in response to the rising cost of housing in the previously very affordable inner city areas that started experiencing gentrification in the early 1980s.

Council believes that a lack of personal wealth should not limit people’s ability to enjoy the opportunities that society offers. Nor does Council underestimate what all community members can contribute to social cohesion and social inclusion. This belief remains a key framework for our local government in understanding and addressing disadvantage and building stronger communities.

Endnotes
Through the Looking Glass: Other Ways of Thinking About Community Development and Homelessness

Anne Coleman, Senior Lecturer, School of Sociology and Social Work, University of Tasmania

This morning, Radio National is doing a piece on the rise of homelessness in inner-city Melbourne. People who are homeless talk about the challenges of being homeless in the Melbourne winter. One man grabs my attention. He talks about hardening community attitudes to homelessness (and the people who are homeless), and the cruelty of the judgement he sees in people’s eyes.

It struck me that of all the hardship he, along with others, was enduring, the one thing that most affected his experience of homelessness was the denial of him as a person that he believed he saw on the faces of his fellow citizens.

His words spoke to me of the untapped potential of community development (CD), and made me ask what it would take to change rough sleepers’ experiences of living in public spaces and their interactions with their fellow citizens.

CD is not a new concept in the homelessness sector. While the method is not widely used, when it is used, it is generally in the belief that people experiencing homelessness lack community and need CD. Scattered round Australia are present and past attempts to work with homeless communities using CD principles. Generally, these have targeted homeless communities to develop resilience; roll out health initiatives; develop new forms of accommodation and tenancies; develop self-advocacy skills; and increase literacy and job readiness.

Many of these projects have had results that have allowed some people experiencing homelessness to transition out of homelessness. For some though, there is a loneliness and sense of never quite fitting in, of being considered different. They leave the streets but the streets cling to them. Their experiences of being housed are in some ways similar to their experiences of living in public spaces.

There are a number of reports that describe the way that housed people respond to homelessness living in public spaces as well as the response of services.

In my 25 years of work, I have experienced the looks of disdain the Radio National interviewee named; observed people swerve significantly to give a wide berth to people who are homeless; heard of complaints to local councillors about the presence of the homeless; steered a homeless agency through neighbourhood hate campaigns and threats against the homeless; argued against the locking of public toilets at 6pm on the basis it denied needed access to rough sleepers; made field notes about public benches shortened or divided to discourage sleeping on them; and comforted people who are homeless who are distressed at the dumping of their belongings as a way of encouraging them to leave the neighbourhood.

I have also seen examples of work that is CD inspired — some organised and intentional; some spontaneous and chaotic; some led by policy shifts or agencies. Yet other interactions and acts are undertaken by housed community members.

Examples of CD style initiatives are plenty. The Long Grass project in Darwin/ Palmerston in the 1990s promoted and advocated for long grass people’s active involvement in maintaining traditional country used by people sleeping out, and gave them a say about appropriate behaviour. In the same decade, the Northern Territory Harmony Project took an inclusive approach that included information about homeless culture and life style that targeted the housed community. In Brisbane, the New Farm Park Trial recognised the right of the homeless to access public spaces, and provided space facilities to establish a camp in the park. The Big Issue gives community members a reason to get to know the vendors as people.

In these processes, great and small, stereotypes are challenged, and relationships of civility and accommodation are formed in public spaces. The Council to Homeless Persons’ Peer Education Support Program gives people who are or who have been homeless a chance to talk about their experiences of homelessness, educate the wider community and advocate for better policies.

All these initiatives recognise and draw on the experiences and skills possessed by people who experience homelessness.

In Australia there have been few sustained attempts to use CD principles to specifically target and inform the housed community about homelessness. It has never been a national priority, and these attempts are rarely funded as a way of addressing homelessness.

While changing attitudes cannot alone provide housing or make up for lost opportunities, it can make a significant difference to how public space dwellers experience every day. It could mean that the next time one man in Melbourne raises his eyes from the street he will see a look of recognition and acceptance rather than disdain and rejection.
Community Investment with Hope

Bruce Tucker, Service Development Manager, Hope Street Youth and Family Services

I am writing this article after my third week at Hope Street Youth and Family Services in the role of Service Development Manager. It is an exciting time to be joining the Hope Street team as the organisation is poised to embark on implementing some great new programs, particularly in the outer growth corridor area of Melton.

Firstly, in April this year, The Premier, Daniel Andrews, and Minister for Housing, Martin Foley announced as part of the investment in a housing blitz comprehensive funding to Hope Street to provide a ‘First Response Youth Service’ in Melton that will provide crisis response support and outreach and include a purpose built refuge facility for vulnerable local young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Alongside this is another new initiative that has just commenced, Hope to Home which is a new pilot program. The purpose of this program is to transition young people from the Homelessness Service System into affordable private rental that is sustainable, in collaboration with the local community of Melton.

The goal of this program is to prevent or reduce the prevalence of young people re-entering homelessness. Hope Street believes young people require a multi-dimensional support system and interventions that require creation of alternative pathways to housing stability, particularly for young people in outer growth corridors.

The Hope to Home Initiative emerged from Hope Street’s discussions and consultations with key stakeholders (including young people) in the City of Melton. Hope to Home will collaborate with the local community to develop and implement strategies to enable increased access and sustainability of private rental for young people/families in response to youth homelessness in local space and place. This initiative is based on strong partnerships between Raine and Horne Real Estate Melton, City of Melton Housing Services, Gandel Philanthropy, Victoria University and Hope Street.

Hope Street became a part of the City of Melton community in 2009 with the establishment of its Hope Street in Melton program that provides supported medium term accommodation to young people and young families who experience homelessness. Since 2009 to now the growth and development of the Hope Street programs within the Melton area has been based upon strong community development principles.

As CEO of Hope Street, Donna Bennett stated after the recent funding announcement:

‘Hope Street has been working closely with various stakeholders in the LGA of Melton to establish an emergency accommodation facility along with specialist wrap around support services for over 220 young people experiencing homelessness. Hope Street acknowledges the collective effort from the Melton Community, Business, City Council, Local MPs and Service Clubs that continue to provide real leadership and advice ensuring this initiative becomes a reality.’

‘This is a real reflection of how a strong community comes together to support its young people,’ she said.

When considering this growth through community development in the Melton region, two comments from City of Melton Council officers to me seem to book-end the community development that has taken place across this time. In 2009, when Hope Street first explored the possibility of tendering for the specialist youth supported accommodation program in Melton, the statement was made that — a lot of organisations and services come to Melton and provide services in an outreach capacity but not many come to embed and join with the local community in developing local services to meet the local needs.

Therefore it was encouraging to hear at an event held this July at Tabcorp Park (a key local business sharing our vision for a better response for young people experiencing homelessness) where Hope Street presented to many local service clubs information in regard to the Hope Street First Response Youth Service, the comment from another Council Officer that Hope Street was an organisation worth getting behind and supporting because they came and invested in this local community and did not just provide their services from a distance.

So what are some of these community development principles that have enabled this outcome and maybe provide some guidance towards other community development projects in the future?

Community development is understood in lots of different ways these days with various models and language that sometimes confuses what we are talking about. Community strengthening and community capacity
building are newer ideas that have developed recently.

For this review I am using a more simple definition of community development, one that brings together members of the local community to enable members to identify and develop actions to address local needs. The basis of this is the six simple and generic steps that are the Neighbourhood House — Community Development Model.

1. involve the community
2. identify the community needs and aspirations
3. determine how to address this in the local context
4. partner with community organisations, businesses, government, philanthropic organisations and individuals towards an outcome to meet the needs and aspirations as determined
5. deliver the services
6. evaluate and review.

In reviewing Hope Street against this model, Steps one to four have been worked through in various ways as will be outlined below and five and six are still evolving and will be the focus over the next few years.

It is my observation that a key decision was made back in 2009 by Hope Street Board and CEO in responding to the challenge in the statement from the Melton City Council Officer that they would not just take on a program and run it from a distance but actively seek to work with and alongside the local community and determine with them what were the local needs and how could these needs be best addressed within the local context.

This meant building relationships with local people and local organisations and then through these relationships gaining an understanding of Melton and its community. In real estate the buzz words are ‘location, location, location’, but in community development it might be, ‘relationships, relationships, relationships’.

A key in this relationship building was to connect with ‘door openers’ in the local community. These are key people who are already well connected and linked within the community and then open doors or link you to other key people. Hope Street was very fortunate to be introduced to a couple of these key people early in the process. In all communities there are always people who have a strong desire to see their community grow and develop and to address emerging issues. Space opens for community development to occur when these key people can be linked together by a common goal and further linked with many others in the community towards developing clear actions towards addressing the local issues with local solutions.

Hope Street was able to take the facilitator role alongside some other key local people and in particular provide a focus around the key local emerging issue of vulnerable young people, family violence and the risk of homelessness and lack of services to address this locally. Building and maintaining these type of relationships was very important and needed to remain a core activity to ensure progress and development. This meant achieving consistent and specific activities, lots of smaller actions to stay connected, to keep the focus, and address any issues and concerns quickly and openly.

Extensive consultations were undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders in the City of Melton including young people (particularly those who had experienced homelessness), key local organisations, local service clubs, local community networks, Inspector for Police for the Melton area, local businesses, local Victorian Members of Parliament and local government executive and officers.

The Councillors and Officers of Melton City Council were an integral factor to the establishment of this development and it fitted well with their strategic goals of advancing the local community in addressing key issues, including for their youth. Along with providing key linkages, they assisted with organising forums, consultations, provided data,
resources and other expertise to assist the processes.

Another integral group were the local Members of Parliament and their Electorate Officers who were highly knowledgeable about key community members/groups and were extremely supportive of processes to engage, resource and connect people and groups who would benefit and share the community’s vision for a specialist youth homelessness service in the City of Melton. Local Members of Parliament were also important in utilising their knowledge, environment (Parliament) and relationships (Government colleagues) in support of the community’s vision.

Local businesses provided resources, spaces for meetings, insights and their name to develop a community response and it was no surprise to discover that many held a strong sense of hope and aspiration for the local community and cared about seeing better options for the young people they connected with.

Hope Street conducted a Partnership Workshop with local stakeholders. The workshop explored a shared vision for a new crisis response and accommodation service for young people in Melton, potential elements of the service model, short and long term actions and partners. From this workshop an Advisory Committee was established with high-level representation from senior stakeholders. The Advisory Committee developed clear Terms of Reference for the Committee which assisted with maintaining an overall focus on achieving the vision and assisted greatly in ensuring local perspectives were maintained and addressed.

Stakeholder engagement was also achieved as part of a detailed research project conducted by Hope Street between November 2014 and August 2015. This research resulted in the launch of the report — *Responding to Youth Homelessness in Outer Growth Corridors: A research project in response to youth homelessness in the City of Melton, August 2015* in September in conjunction with Woodgrove Shopping Centre in Melton. This research report then formed the basis of writing a business case to the State Government for the funding to establish the Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Melton initiative to meet the identified needs re-affirmed by the research.

It was then a case of presenting the report to the community and again a number of community events were undertaken including presentations to key organisations and community groups where a proposed draft model for comment was put forward. This included development of a concept model for the facility that was very generously prepared by an architectural group. The Advisory Committee played a key role in seeing this undertaken and brought together.

It is important to build the case around what the community has identified and come to some agreement as to how the issues might be addressed from a local perspective. Though some aspects of the model overall could be sensed prior to the research, there was also lots of new insights and perspectives that were able to be added to the eventual model that was developed.

Once the model was developed it was then important to line up all the key influential supporters so that the business case would be presented from a strong position.

Hope Street and *Melton Leader* teamed up late last year to launch the Centre for Hope campaign, to raise awareness of homelessness in Melton and push the urgent need.

The Housing Minister, Martin Foley, was reported to have stated to the local member that the business case presented such a compelling view that it could not be ignored.

Without the consultations, the development of the model based on what was identified and revealed by the community, the ongoing significant support of the wider Melton community and advocacy of local MP’s this might not have been the case. The business case may have been put forward by Hope Street but it had the full weight of the community behind it and without this it would not have been anywhere near as compelling.

It is often stated that homelessness is a community problem and needs the community to be part of the solution. However putting this into practice is not always easy and requires effort and time. Because Hope Street started and focused on the ideal of investing into the local community, the result has been a community developed solution into youth homelessness in Melton. My role going forward will be to continue to facilitate and nurture collaboration within the local community to achieve our shared vision.
The role of community development in responding to homelessness is integral and should not be overlooked in broader policy objectives that aim to reduce and end homelessness. This article highlights Adelaide City Council’s (ACC) decision to support social entrepreneurs and enterprises. The benefits of our community development work in community centres and neighbourhood development are complemented by encouraging the development of social enterprises in Adelaide. The value that social enterprises can create for people experiencing homelessness is truly touching and the evidence base continues to grow.

GOGO Events, a local social enterprise, demonstrates how the model can be used to provide dignity and renewed identity to people experiencing homelessness through the provision of meaningful employment. This newfound dignity is forged by creating an environment that allows people experiencing homelessness to identify as something other than homeless, marginalised or disadvantaged. It provides much needed respite from the harsh realities of being homeless.

The Adelaide City Council 2016–2020 strategic plan includes a core aspiration for Adelaide to be a ‘Liveable’ city and it intends to ‘support social entrepreneurs to develop business models that have a positive impact on the City’s wellbeing and resilience’.

ACC’s Participation and Inclusion team has recently supported the social enterprise sector through a ‘Social Ventures Incubator Program’ and the ‘Social Capital Conference’. The incubator program is the first of its kind in South Australia and aims to take ten early stage social enterprises through a rigorous ten week program where they can test and refine their business ideas and models.

Of the 52 applicants, 13 aimed to create opportunities for people experiencing homelessness. The Social Capital Conference was another first for South Australia and brought together over 200 people from the public, private and non-profit sector to discuss ‘social entrepreneurship, innovation and enterprise’ and the immense opportunities available in this underexplored sector. It was the first time the three sectors have come together to reframe disadvantage as...
an unprecedented opportunity to create a socially just South Australia.

The social enterprise sector has garnered significant attention over the past eight to ten years nationally and internationally. While there is no legal definition of a social enterprise, Social Traders, a national social enterprise development organisation, has developed a working definition in consultation with the sector:

‘Social enterprises are organisations that:
• are led by an economic, social, cultural, or environmental mission consistent with a public or community benefit
• trade to fulfil their mission
• derive a substantial portion of their income from trade
• reinvest the majority of their profit/surplus in the fulfilment of their mission.’

They are, in essence, private enterprises run by people who hold values similar to those that underpin community development.

One example of a local social enterprise is GOGO Events which was founded by Sarah Gun 15 years ago and transformed into a social enterprise four years ago. GOGO Events provides bespoke event management and design services for corporate and government events and conferences. The enterprise provides paid employment and training for clients of the Hutt Street Centre and The Big Issue in Adelaide. The homeless and marginalised employees of the business are always paid the award wage or higher for training and work that they undertake. In the 2015/2016 financial year GOGO Events has employed 41 homeless or marginalised people across 16 separate corporate events, some of whom have worked on multiple occasions. The corporate clients are fully aware that the business employs marginalised people and all contracts include some employment opportunities.

This type of positive discrimination in GOGO Events employment policy is synonymous with social justice professions like community development. The Australia Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics reiterates this sentiment; ‘In circumstances where clients are denied access to resources necessary for their well-being, positive discrimination may be justifiable’.

People experiencing homelessness are largely denied the opportunity to work for a myriad of structural reasons often beyond their control. With a lack of available pathways out of homelessness, they are constantly reminded that they are indeed homeless, unemployed and disadvantaged. GOGO Events demonstrates the enormous capacity of social enterprise to create opportunities and bring people together. It also demonstrates the potential for the sector to create sustainable, reliable and meaningful pathways out of homelessness.

By supporting social enterprise ACC can include people experiencing homelessness in an aspect of life that they do not often get to experience and we can contribute to a sustainable solution to homelessness. Social entrepreneurs, by their nature are leaders within the community and community development workers can help build their capacity as well as that of people experiencing homelessness.

The combined effect of this work means that people experiencing homelessness truly get to belong in our community. They get to identify as employees and active members of society rather than as homeless. These community development approaches are essential in responding to homelessness. A community development response is to seek out and listen to homeless communities while endeavouring to facilitate a dignified exit from homelessness.

Endnotes
Community Development in Regional Caravan Parks

Alexandra Millar, Senior Project Officer, Quantum Support Services Inc

Inner Gippsland’s demographics exhibit a number of the associated risk factors of homelessness such as a lower than average Victorian median weekly household income, high socio-economic disadvantage, family stress, social isolation and poor health indicators.

All four local government areas that make up our region (Bass Coast, Baw Baw, Latrobe and South Gippsland), report higher than the state average of family violence rates with Latrobe reporting the highest number of reported family violence incidences in Victoria, two and a half times the state average. In addition it has the highest proportion of young people admitted to Out of Home Care and the highest ratio of child protection reports in the state, including the highest re-report rate of any region.

Within that setting, there are particular pockets of even greater disadvantage. For example, some of our local caravan parks are often filled with people who experience pronounced social isolation and marginalisation who have exhausted the traditional forms of support being provided by services.

In the absence of sufficient transitional accommodation across Victoria and the inappropriateness of boarding houses, the long waiting periods for public housing and a lack of other affordable options, caravan parks have become a place where many ‘homeless’ clients end up (see Parity article Volume 28, Issue 2, March 2015). While there can be long-term transient people there, it can also be single people unable to afford private rental, families fleeing violence or young people unable to remain at home. It represents the full spectrum from the chronically homeless to those at the precipice of homelessness.

Caravan parks in our region have attracted significant attention and intermittent responses (with limited success) from various local agencies and government to address the anti-social issues, criminal activity and the entrenched disadvantage on display that has sometimes spilled out into the wider community.

The recently launched Homelessness and Social Housing Reform pilot sites articulates the ‘new way of working’ that is evident in a project funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and developed by Quantum Support Services in Inner Gippsland. Here the emphasis is on individualised outcomes, demonstrating a shift in focus from housing crisis to the long-term health and wellbeing outcomes of service users. This project is concentrated on work in two caravan parks at Miner’s Rest (Wonthaggi) and Drouin. The project recognises that place based solutions which are targeted, informed by local knowledge and tailored to suit the unique characteristics and circumstances of the community are the most effective approach in creating positive change.

The project started initially with the assumption that tenant participation activities would be held at both sites to learn more about the residents and their vision of what could be and then facilitate that happening. However, the project evolved on the basis of a greater understanding of the tenant’s circumstances and the reasons they found themselves in an Inner Gippsland caravan park. Indeed it became clear that greater flexibility was needed in adjusting the delivery of the community development project in order to actively engage and respond to this marginalised group of people.

Many of the residents were placed in the Miner’s Rest caravan park by support agencies from outside of the region through the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF), believing that low cost accommodation was readily available in regional locations and that a caravan park was a good base for clients to secure low-cost private rental and re-establish themselves. Unfortunately this is no longer the case with median rents across regional Victoria having increased up to 40 per cent over the last five years (according to the Council to Homeless Persons in 2015). As a result, these vulnerable families found themselves unsupported, in a financially unsustainable situation, away from their networks of friends or family and with a reluctance to re-engage with homelessness services through the ‘Open Doors’ framework.

A ‘low threshold’ engagement strategy was undertaken which did not require the service users to participate in an intake process or burden them with expectations of consistent, regular attendance, adherence to strict rules or extensive disclosure. This approach enabled our workers to meet this hard-to-reach group where they were, to build trust and rapport and therefore a pathway to the services and support that was required.

This assertive outreach approach challenges the notion that the service user is always responsible for engaging with services and has to demonstrate a commitment to support. Instead this approach recognises that by definition, vulnerable and disconnected people may be unable to seek help through a lack of confidence or resources or a sense of powerlessness. Or as in many cases in Miner’s Rest, a sense of hopelessness about the ‘system’
providing a positive result for them given their placement into the caravan park was facilitated by a support agency. In an assertive outreach approach, the service determines who is most in need of support and proactively meets them in their own environment.

It is a persistent, practical and respectful approach with the service user setting the pace and nature of engagement and therefore building their self-determination and confidence in their ability to transition out of homelessness.

This client-centred approach in Miner’s Rest and Drouin began simply with the service being a regular presence at the sites. It evolved over time to assistance on an individual level through the provision of information, food vouchers, material aid and advocacy that also built a basis for further engagement.

Later the approach developed into more structured tenant participation activities such as community lunches, excursions, social activities and capacity building events. These activities enabled assistance to be provided more broadly through a building of protective factors such as establishing important social and community connections and over a longer-term, a reduction in the risk of homelessness.

As a result of this approach there have been some significant outcomes:
- in engaging positively with the residents
- maintaining a focus on improving their circumstances
- enabling residents to come together to discover their own community’s strengths
- designing a vision of how they would like their community to improve.

Residents have identified their plan of action on a range of issues such as improving water regulation and establishing a community garden.

In addition, as engagement developed an increased number of people disclosed further information to community development workers and links were facilitated to specialised homelessness services that enabled assistance with rental arrears or previous debt that had been a barrier to accessing private rental. Further engagement also enabled service connections to be made to address risk factors such as family violence, mental health issues, unemployment, poverty, alcohol and drug (mis)use.

Significantly, there was also a reduction of local police involvement in anti-social incidents at the parks.

A community development focus at these parks has also enabled strong relationships to be built with the caravan park proprietors including creating opportunities for them to make referrals, advertise upcoming events and participate in activities.

This project demonstrated that for some clients, effective client engagement can be facilitated through creative strategies that allow service providers to establish a profile within a community and promote greater confidence amongst clients.

This approach, when combined with flexible and proactive outreach work establishes a crucial pathway into services for those marginalised from the broader service system and demonstrates that community development approaches can be an effective model as a preventative or early intervention approach to homelessness.

One of the challenges of this project, and many other community development projects, is the absence of a Department of Health and Human Services funding stream that is dedicated to facilitating this long-term commitment from services wanting to utilise a community development approach to address homelessness.

Instead, services have to pursue alternative funding sources to maintain successful interventions such as those at Miner’s Rest and Drouin.

Perhaps, with the launch of the Homelessness and Social Housing Reform pilot site in Inner Gippsland and in other parts of Victoria, an opportunity can be found for services to pursue ‘bottom up’ responses to these deficiencies in funding and influence the value placed by government on funding assertive outreach and community development approaches as an effective way of preventing and addressing homelessness.
Belonging, Hope and Purpose: The Role of Community Development in Responding to Homelessness

Robyn Szechtman Project Leader, Voices of the South Side project from Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre

'So then they stop case managing you now that you are housed and you’re at the beginning really — okay now I’m on my feet but that’s all I’ve got. And that’s the other thing — what do you do with your time? Once you’ve spent your whole life dealing, scoring, running, looking for somewhere to sleep, looking for food — you’re so busy all the time. What am I going to do to fill my mind and fill my time so that I’m not thinking about drugs …’

— Mich, Homelessness Focus Group, 2012

Next Phase
For many people who have experienced homelessness, the relief of finally having a safe place to live is overshadowed by loneliness and disconnection.

‘I actually had some status when I was homeless but when I stopped being homeless and gave up drugs, there were a heap of people that didn’t want to talk to me anymore. And I didn’t …fit into normal society’

— Kat, Homelessness Focus Group, 2012

A sense of belonging, hope and purpose can play an important role for people trying to create positive change in their lives. Without this, they can relapse into destructive behaviours leading back into homelessness. There is a lot of stigma and shame to overcome and many barriers exist in the form of isolation, lack of social and communication skills, lack of confidence and trust.

How Do You Break the Cycle?
For many people it’s about finding their voice and developing the confidence to use it. People who have experienced disadvantage in their lives can be amazingly resilient. We can learn from these experiences. Often they just need to be supported to see themselves in a different, more positive light. The opportunity to learn new skills, participate in creative activities, work and be a part of a community of supportive people can be life changing.

Voices of the South Side
These tenets underlie a program called Voices of the South Side (VoSS), a two year federally funded community development program. It is a partnership between project leaders Port Melbourne Neighbourhood Centre (PMNC) and partners Inner South Community Health (ISCH), Port Phillip Community Group and Southport Community Housing. This holistic program targets people who have experienced issues such as homelessness, substance abuse or physical/mental illness and live in rooming houses and social/public housing in the City of Port Phillip. It delivers training courses, mentoring and group activities that build the confidence of vulnerable people to increase their participation in community life.

Speaking Out
'I had just come from a place where the best thing for all was to keep mouths shut most of the time — to either not get in trouble with the screws or other girls. So with the VoSS crew, we learnt again to play with and find strength in our voice, discover hidden talents, exercise assertiveness and create a comfortable place to stand in our own skin physically and metaphorically’

— Val, VoSS Graduate, St Kilda News, 2015

At the core of VoSS is a 10-week course “Speaking Out” that teaches people to speak in public, advocacy and communication skills. This course was previously called the Community Leadership Course and dates back to 2009 when it was developed to provide marginalised residents with the confidence and skills to be a part of the St Kilda Inclusion Program Committee based at the City of Port Phillip, then later adapted by Port Phillip Community Group from 2012. It has continued to run twice a year since that time, with the curriculum expanded to suit the needs of participants.

The course encourages people to gain confidence in their own abilities and supports them to make new connections with the community. Opportunities include further education, volunteer work or employment. The key to these positive outcomes is creating a nurturing and supportive learning environment, which encourages people to see the best in themselves and others.

Outreach and Engagement Model
The VoSS outreach and engagement model provides two workers allowing positive behaviours to be role modelled due to the strength of their personal relationship.

'We all get on really well, eating with each other, chatting with each other and just opening up. It’s just absolutely beautiful. Just the way you’ve made the environment like your home, you’ve invited us all into your home and we all want to just keep coming’

— Speaking Out Course Focus Group, 2016

I am from PMNC that manages the program and co-facilitate the Speaking Out course with Deb McIntosh from the ISCH Community Connections Program. Both of us have over 30 years’ experience working with marginalised and complex clients in the drug and alcohol, health and...
criminal justice sector. Having experienced trainers/facilitators with backgrounds in education and psychology allows a tailored strength-based approach that builds the emotional and practical skills necessary to build new pathways.

Addressing Barriers to Participation
To join the course, each student meets with the facilitators prior to commencement for an informal interview. A key question concerns any barriers they might encounter to participating and how the facilitators can support them through these. Problematic issues and practical strategies to alleviate them are discussed with the student and implemented on the first day of the course.

Food is always provided as many of our participants do not eat regularly and this affects people’s ability to concentrate.

The partnership with ISCH provides access to a diverse range of services to help participants overcome barriers such as missing teeth, insecure housing or issues with Centrelink service. Referrals are also available to access counseling services to help deal with mental health and lifestyle issues. This practical support in combination with a nurturing learning environment provides the foundation to begin the long journey of change. The case management aspect of the program plays a vital part in its success.

Employment, Volunteer and Training Opportunities
The ‘Speaking Out’ course connects participants to a larger community of other VoSS graduates that builds friendships and social networks. Once they have completed this core course, graduates are encouraged to enrol in other courses where they can continue to learn as a group. Opportunities are available to gain employment as community researchers through training in survey and interview skills. Arts-orientated courses are available to explore writing, filmmaking and performance.

Some graduates go into employment orientated courses that are offered at PMNC such as the Customer Service and Reception course (ARCS) and start to connect into volunteer work.

‘My first volunteer job at Port Melbourne Carnival was the most amazing experience. I had been asked to manage a little recycle shop and I became important again, instead of just a number in the system. I would never exchange the feeling I had on that one day for the highest paying job in the world.’
— Helena, PMNC Newsletter, 2016

Community Research
Graduates are offered the opportunity for paid casual work doing community research for organisations. They are hired for their ability to contribute their lived experiences to policy development as consumer representatives and also to reach marginalised populations where they are more likely to give honest feedback to peer researchers. They are confident to go to places where professionals may feel uncomfortable or too conspicuous.

Five graduates were recently hired by the Department of Justice and Regulation to test a website for rooming house residents and ten of our graduates assisted the City of Port Phillip to provide support to residents of local housing estates to complete their Census Forms.

A small number of graduates become facilitators in training courses for professional workers to help them reflect on and improve their practice with marginalised clients. They share their stories of dealing with services and what has helped them to make changes in their lives.

‘I found something that I’m really passionate about. I have managed to open up my life after many years of a lifeless existence’
— VoSS Graduate, Evaluation Focus Group, 2016

Committees
Graduates are also supported to become consumer representatives for other organisations and learn to use their experiences to educate others and have a positive impact on organisational policies. Opportunities are available to speak at a variety of public events such as the Homeless Memorial, Annual General Meetings, City of Port Phillip forums and local schools. Our graduates are consumer representatives on ISCH committees including Diversity, Community Participation, Homeless memorial, VoSS Committee, board members of PMNC and as interviewers on staff recruitment panels.

Joy Through Creative Expression
Creative opportunities provided by VoSS have allowed people to blossom. Trying out a variety of creative activities have taken participants beyond their comfort zones and developed self esteem and confidence. This provides an additional avenue to the more conventional methods of training and employment.

The sheer joy of interacting positively with others through activities like dancing, performing and film making cannot be underestimated. Lives are enriched through friendship, informal mentoring and socialising.

Screening Digital Stories
Stay tuned for the upcoming screening of a series of digital stories in October 2016 showcasing Voices of the South Side.

For more information contact robyn@pmnc.org.au.

Endnotes
1. Szechtman R 2010, How We Have Helped Others to Help Ourselves, Parity, vol. 23 no.4, p 40.
COSS: Building a ‘Community of Schools and Services’ Model

Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Swinburne University

The challenge of reducing homelessness in Australia remains yet to be met. However, clues as to how this might be done more effectively are embedded in various policy documents. Should policy mainly focus on expanding the existing Specialist Homelessness Service system? Should policy focus on responding to chronic homelessness? Or, should a greater focus be on preventing homelessness? These kinds of questions are somewhat misleading because an affirmative answer to any one of them would be a simplistic reduction of the policy agenda. The focus of this discussion is homelessness as experienced by adolescents and young adults.

The Federal Government White Paper, The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness’ remains a benchmark framework for the work underway around the states and territories to develop a more effective response to homelessness. Apart from the historic objective of halving homelessness by 2020, the White Paper advanced three strategic areas for policy and program development:

- a) ‘turning off the tap’ or early intervention
- b) ‘improving and expanding services’ or reform and enhancement of the existing homelessness service system
- c) ‘breaking the cycle’ or measures to prevent people who have experienced homelessness from returning to homelessness. This principally signalled investment to increase the supply of affordable housing and wrap around support for high need individuals who were chronically homeless.

In terms of ‘turning off the tap’, the White Paper argued that ‘local initiatives have demonstrated that homelessness can be prevented. Significant effort should be focused on delivering evidence-based services across the country to stop people — especially children, families and young people becoming homeless in the first place’. Well significant effort has not been applied! Almost nothing has been done since 2008 to stem the flow of young people, families and older single adults into homelessness. That being the case, it means continual pressure on homelessness services, and increased demand for housing options for those who have become homeless.

While homelessness is more than simply a housing issue, once someone has become homeless, it certainly becomes a housing issue along with whatever other issues exist for particular individuals.

The White Paper delivered another key idea: ‘While specialist homelessness services are an effective way to deliver crisis and ongoing support, they cannot deliver the entire response. Mainstream services need to improve their response to people who are homeless’.

Following the White Paper’s release, there was considerable debate about the role of mainstream services and how they might play a more effective role in the homelessness response and whether homelessness funding ought to be directed into mainstream services.

Ever since the homelessness services system (SAAP) was developed in the mid-1980s, workers and sector leaders have pointed out that people entering homelessness services were often the result of the failure of other mainstream service systems. No doubt true in many cases. But, how can mainstream service systems such as health, education or justice be mobilised to address homelessness.

For mainstream systems, ‘homelessness’, compared with the other issues for which they are responsible, is a relatively small consideration.

Cross-sectoral initiatives are difficult to get up. Cross-sectoral coordination is typically problematic or short-lived. The reference in the earlier quotation to ‘local initiatives’ suggests place-based approaches are important, but that idea has not been developed. In terms of ‘early intervention’, perhaps the Reconnect program should be maintained and expanded. Many, particularly those involved with Reconnect, certainly argue that way and understandably so. Reconnect stands as the only dedicated early intervention program for any homeless cohort. However, Reconnect although a viable program, has limitations and I have argued that a place-based local community systems reform approach rather than a program response is required to really make a difference. The risk of change going wrong notwithstanding, there is a compelling argument to preserve the early intervention capacity of Reconnect by embedding that capacity in coordinated place-based model of early intervention.

A genuinely innovative and major reform-oriented approach to addressing youth homelessness is The Geelong Project, an exemplar of the ‘community of schools and services’ (COSS) model of early intervention. The COSS model can be aptly described as a ‘collective impact’ approach in which the community’s support resources, that
are available for young people, work collaboratively to a common vision and practice framework using the same data measurement tools. The concept of ‘collective impact’ was first advanced by John Kania and Mark Kramer. They emphasised five key elements.

The concept of collective impact conjoins two concepts hitherto not closely connected — community development (collective) and a strong focus on outcomes (impact). As happens, various claimants have popped up espousing collective impact, apparently having been doing collective impact all along. If only that were so. However, the five key elements are a strict regime that relatively few projects or initiatives have managed to achieve. Collective impact generally has a place-based scope, and in all cases, emphasises a collaborative approach to whatever issue is the focus for change.

In terms of vulnerable young people and the effort to prevent homelessness due to family breakdown, while at the same time reducing early school leaving, the COSS model is a place-based approach in which the primary focus for development and service delivery as well as the measurement of outcomes is development of a community consisting of the local ‘community of schools and services’ and the young people and families that they serve. Place-based approaches emphasise a geographical location or area. In the case of The Geelong Project, it is the regional City of Greater Geelong.

Picking up the issue of mainstream services playing a role in the response to homelessness, in the COSS model, as an early intervention model for vulnerable young people, the mainstream service system is school. Nearly all young people begin secondary school and most complete secondary school, however, some one in five leave before completing Year 12. Figure 1 sets out the four foundations of the COSS collective impact model.

The first foundation is ‘community collaboration’ or collaborative referral decision-making by school welfare staff and early intervention workers through a single point of entry. While there is formality involved in making referrals, the decisions about making a referral and what level of support might be appropriate are made jointly as far as possible. Referral decisions are data and evidence driven. New governance structures and processes are required to formalise the community collaboration in MOUs and terms of reference.

Schools and youth agencies may be funded through different departments and operate in different sectors, yet through a process of community development, it is eminently possible to overcome such silo barriers on the ground. Achieving collective impacts depends on local service systems change. The term collaboration is widely used to describe any kind of cooperative behaviour, whereas it should be reserved for the highest level of cooperation possible and this is what is required for genuine collective impact. In an important sense, establishing community collaboration is a necessary condition for being able to change the local support system available for vulnerable young people and families.

The second foundation is population screening for risk using a series of indicators on an Australian Index of Adolescent Development (AIAD) survey instrument combined with local information from schools and a brief screening/engagement interview — this methodology allows risk to be rigorously assessed and pre-crisis proactive intervention response to be delivered. The present youth service system is primarily crisis-oriented along with cognate post-crisis programs. Effective early intervention for vulnerable young people needs to be able to reach at-risk young people and their families before the onset of crises.

The third and fundamentally important foundation of the COSS model is a flexible and responsive practice framework with three levels of response ‘active monitoring’, ‘short term support’, and ‘wrap around’ case management for complex cases. Not every young person where family issues are evident and where there is a level of risk of homelessness requires case-work support.

When case work is provided, it is a youth-focused and family-centred case management approach that involves young person, their family, schools and agencies working together from the same care plan. Family dysfunction, which can cover a wide range of complex issues, means that working with a young person also involves working with their family members. What support is needed varies from one point in time to another and the capacity of a COSS early intervention platform to operate flexibly and longitudinally is a key to achieving service delivery efficiencies and well as improved outcomes.

### Table 1: Collective Impact

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<th><strong>Five Key Elements of Collective Impact</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Common Agenda</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Shared Measurement</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Continuous Communication</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Backbone Support</strong></td>
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Fourthly, the COSS Model has a strong approach to the measurement of outcomes. Remediating family dysfunction may serve to avert early home leaving and the onset of homelessness, but at the same time, addressing family issues contributes to reducing early school leaving and the amelioration of other problems as well. Family factors contribute in large measure to poor educational outcomes. Current approaches within education to addressing disadvantage are unable to significantly affect these family factors, which may explain why school completion rates have shifted very little since the late 1990s.

A whole of community approach to outcomes for young people looks at the entire community cohort of vulnerable young people and monitors what has been achieved over time. This contrasts with the current agency-focused approach which assesses agencies against putative targets with a weak approach to meeting the need in a community overall.

The COSS model began with The Geelong Project, but is beginning additional trials in New South Wales, South Australia and possibly Victoria. In Canada, two trial sites are commencing in 2017, and there is vigorous advocacy underway for wider adoption throughout Canada. In the United States, the first trial site is likely to begin in Seattle in 2017. Perhaps the COSS model is a concept whose time has come.

Endnotes
2. ibid p. 15.
3. ibid p.15.

Fast facts
In its first operational phase,
TGP identified and responded to
95 young people
and
41 family members
including 10% from CALD backgrounds.

For all it appears to have been the first program to identify the participants as being at-risk of homelessness and to assess all of the risk factors in their lives.

If left unsupported these factors could lead many to a lifetime of homelessness, mental illness, low socio-economic employment, entry into the justice system or worse, life-threatening despair.

In most cases our early intervention team offered the first case worker to ever discuss their challenges at home and at school.

60% of our young clients were dealing with family violence
90% showed evidence of disengaging from school
22% of young people and family members had a disability that was unknown or unsupported
28% of youth and 32% of parents had alcohol and drug abuse issues
48% had unaddressed mental health issues

From The Geelong Project Prospectus
Consumer Voices

Community Development as a Response to Homelessness

Consumer Voices is a regular feature in Parity. Articles are written by and with consumers to ensure they have a say about the issues that directly affect them.

Introduction
John and Jason, members of the Peer Education Support Program have experienced homelessness. They met to discuss a community development approach and how it relates to the lives of people experiencing homelessness, and considered whether it was a useful approach to ending homelessness.

Empowerment
According to Jason and John people experiencing homelessness are always being told what to do. This is not a good approach to solving the problem. For example, if the service's solution is not what a person experiencing homelessness wants, they will probably become homeless again. If you only offer someone an option and tell them they have to take it or leave it, they will often leave and return to homelessness.

Jason and John think that if each person who became homeless was allocated funding when they accessed a service, then they should have some say in how that funding is spent. Jason was told that his only option for emergency accommodation was the Gatwick Hotel. His accommodation was charged at a daily rate for three months. He would have liked to have had the power to negotiate to pay upfront, thus saving money.

Information
When they were homeless, both John and Jason felt they did not have the information about services. John says: ‘I didn’t know where to go to get help or who to go to, so I lost power. I didn’t even know why I had to fill in three forms for housing but I did it because I knew that’s what you did to get housing.’

They believe information is powerful. They said they would like to see people experiencing homelessness given more information about homelessness services, how to access housing and their options so that they can make a decision about what to do.

According to Jason and John, when you are homeless, you think no-one cares about you. However, if you know about what services and other organisations are doing for people who are experiencing homelessness, you would realise that they do care.

Jason would have liked to know about what local government was doing to address homelessness. Had he known that they cared, he says he would not have given the rangers such a hard time.

They believe that if you are given information about how the system works and some options to solve problems, you can address the issues you face.

Participation
Jason and John think people who are experiencing homelessness in each local area should be encouraged to come together and develop a committee on solving homelessness in that community. That way the local government would know about how they feel and what they want to achieve.

This would give them the power to make decisions for themselves. Doing this would give them information about what they can or cannot do or have and why this is the case.

Self-determination
Jason and John believe people should be able to make their own decisions about what they need and what is best for them. There should be a Homelessness Party, made up of people who have experienced homelessness. They believe that the highest level of participation in society is government. The highest level of self-determination is a political party for people who have experienced homelessness. This would be the ultimate platform to give people who have experienced homelessness a voice.

Partnership
John and Jason would like to see a partnership group established that included people who are or who have experienced homelessness and all relevant government departments. They would then have ongoing discussions about homelessness. Homelessness affects everyone, so everyone should be involved in the solution.

Conclusion
John and Jason believe that the current response to homelessness is not a community development approach. They think that there could be some benefits of moving to a whole of community approach, using a community development framework. The approach would adopt community development principals. The result could be a more cohesive, inclusive and proactive community that works together to develop solutions to issues like homelessness.
Stigma, Politics and Affordable Housing: Some Considerations Regarding the Potential of Community Development in Addressing Homelessness

Daniel Kuzmanovski, University of South Australia

Introduction

Homelessness is a complex social issue. How it is understood influences both how practice is undertaken and how people experiencing homelessness are treated. The focus of the current Parity edition is on the community development approach and the role it can play to better understand and address homelessness. Addressing homelessness requires placing genuine value on the voice of those experiencing homelessness. As a perspective emphasising the legitimacy of collective community action and knowledge in projects of social change, the community development approach appears well suited to achieve this task.

This article introduces the community development approach in regard to homelessness in Australia. Specific focus will be on the affordable housing sector, particularly in relation to South Australia’s social housing reform currently underway. Rather than presenting a community development ‘how-to’ guide, the focus of this article surrounds how the approach relates to the reform project as well as a discussion of two potential barriers that can emerge through community development practice. This will involve discussion of the stigma associated with homelessness and the political context of practice.

The Community Development Approach Within a Homelessness Context: Affordable Housing

How community development is defined, how it is applied formally, and what aspects of homelessness are focused on are all varying questions addressed only by the specific context of chosen practice. The City of Casey in Victoria is one example where the community development approach itself has been incorporated into a practice framework, defining community development as ‘a process for enhancing the wellbeing of all residents’.

The framework involves community development principles of:

- inclusiveness (ensuring meaningful participation of community members in projects)
- collaboration (development of social networks through cross partnerships)
- capacity building (empowerment of community members and related advocacy)
- equity (fair distribution of resources)
- responsiveness (ensuring adaptation of projects to changing needs and situations).

Neighbourhood House Victoria has also incorporated the approach, defining community development as ‘a process in which people within an identified community participate to increase their life opportunities, choices and skills’. Like the City of Casey framework, it emphasises:

- The involvement of the community at every stage of the process
- The identification of needs and determination of action through such involvement
- The partnerships which such a reflexive process builds.

In a practice context, community development can be applied as a process (that is, a method of social change), a program (that is, a specific project / activity of change), an outcome, (that is, a specific change goal/outcome), and as an ‘ideology of action’.

Regardless of its application, the purpose of collectively identifying particular aspects of homelessness and working towards addressing these aspects remains the same. Of particular focus in this article is social exclusion resulting from a lack of access to appropriate and affordable housing. The role of public housing since its establishment within South Australia in 1936 was to provide subsidised housing for low income earners. Since the 1990s and following funding reductions and changing demographics, public housing has become specifically targeted to those most vulnerable and experiencing complex social needs.

One project of local social housing reform is the ‘Housing SA Blueprint 2013–2018’ framework released in 2013 by the South Australian Government. The framework discusses the changing nature of local social housing and outlines the future direction towards the growth of community housing. Because the Blueprint does not directly acknowledge the influence of a community development approach, this article will use the framework as an example to discuss how the community development approach might be relevant or is already reflected in current and potential practice.

As a process, community development principles of inclusiveness and collaboration could be applied to the Blueprint’s proposed ‘integrated regionalised approach’. The proposed aim of such an approach is to involve local communities in both identification of local issues and determination of subsequent action. This aims to ensure that ‘people in local communities will get an opportunity to come together with housing and support providers to plan, develop
solutions and agree on actions that will benefit the local community.¹⁰

These principles are also relevant to the Blueprint’s emphasis on building community and organisational partnerships, and its incorporation of collaboration and the question of “How do we involve the right people in the decision making processes?” as one key concept of future service design.¹¹ The Blueprint itself does not discuss what community collaboration took place for the document’s development, nor the specific community involvement plans that are to take place as part of the framework. However, applying the community development approach in this context could guide such a process towards genuine community inclusion.

As a program, community development principles of collaboration and capacity building could be reflected in the Blueprint’s emphasis on ‘Community housing growth programs’, the increased involvement of support services, and Housing SA’s future ‘position within a broader network of providers’.¹² One part of the reform program involves the initial transfer of a proportion of public housing stock to the community sector.¹³ Incorporating the responsiveness principle could monitor that the project continues to meet local needs of the community members who are directly impacted. Community development as an outcome is relevant to the intended targets and results of such a transfer process, as well as directly stated Blueprint intentions related to ‘System outcomes’, ‘Organisational outcomes’, and ‘Benefits for the people’.¹⁴ What the Blueprint however does not discuss are limitations to such intended programs, processes and outcomes.
Stigma, Homelessness and Community Development

One potential barrier relates to the stigma associated with homelessness. Stigma is a physical or non-physical attribute which discredits its bearer and has detrimental consequences for one’s social participation and identity.18 Stigmatised attributes gain their discrediting potency through social interaction by drawing on wider structural social norms, which include dominant public perceptions of what is considered normal or deviant and the reasoning behind such views.18 In relation to individuals experiencing homelessness, stigma has its roots in residual perceptions of homelessness as the result of individual’s life choices, social actions and personal irresponsibility. A 2014 survey conducted by Homelessness Australia found that 64 per cent of respondents believed that an individual’s efforts to ‘get a job’ would be the main way to address their homelessness.17 In addition to ignoring the reality that people can become homeless whilst employed 18 (not all homelessness is sleeping rough either), such perceptions downplay or ignore structural factors such as availability of affordable housing, wider financial instability, and a diversity of surrounding circumstances.

As most practitioners are aware, community development necessitates responding to such wider factors. Different experiences will identify different needs, which in turn will determine the appropriateness of different courses of action. Stigma can be a barrier to individual and community trust, which in turn can limit community development principles of inclusiveness and involvement. Building trust will involve understanding a potential history of stigmatisation and ensuring that the community development practice does not further contribute to this history through forced involvement or selective involvement (excluding community members with ‘complex needs’). There is also a need to be aware of and address stigmatising attitudes within the community itself (that is, public housing stigma and geographical stigma).19 Not addressing this barrier can result in potentially tokenistic practice and inappropriate solutions with unsustainable outcomes.

Community Development and the Political Context

Another potential barrier to community development is the political context within which practice occurs. From the 1990s, questions regarding the efficiency and purpose of the public housing sector started gaining prominence. Subsequently, a shift occurred where funding expenditure for Rent Assistance (RA) increased in comparison to the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) — one program primarily responsible for funding the public housing sector.20 It could be argued therefore that the Blueprint is being implemented within a political context of disinvestment in social housing.

Firstly, such a context could intensify pre-existing homelessness stigma. Lower availability of affordable housing in conjunction with higher rates of need can lead to intensified welfare stigmatisation (a form of stigma which is well documented but outside of this article’s scope). As with stigma, this can impact principles of inclusiveness and involvement. Secondly, one could question the ability of community development principles of responsiveness and equity to be implemented in their full capacity within a context of unstable funding. Significant attention would need to be placed on ensuring that resource distribution and project foci are according to local community needs and rather than other funding priorities.

Conclusions: The Utility of a Community Development Approach?

Not addressing homelessness stigma can impact trust, limit inclusive and relevant practice, and further degrade the wellbeing of those already most vulnerable. Similarly, undertaking community development with inadequate attention towards the political context of practice could ultimately result in programs without a sustainable future. This suggests that when implementing the community development approach, there is a need to incorporate an understanding of wider social systemic factors which might impact practice.

However, what remains refreshing and significant about the community development approach is the value it places on individuals. Shifting power back to people experiencing homelessness as experts of local knowledge accomplishes a task of involving individuals in research and projects in a manner that avoids residual pathology. Similarly, community development programs themselves can be designed as stigma reduction programs and advocacy projects highlighting funding inequalities. Given the current emphasis on the community housing sector and multi-provider systems, the community development approach is likely to remain relevant to aspects of homelessness.

Endnotes

2. ibid.
4. ibid.
7. ibid p.6.
11. ibid p.4, p.13.
12. ibid p.6–7.
13. ibid p.9.
14. ibid p.25.
16. ibid.
17. Homelessness Australia, Perceptions of homelessness, Homelessness Australia, Australian Capital Territory, p.8
18. ibid.
Rubys: Enabling Young People to Participate in Their Community

Mitchell Anderson, Acting Service Manager, Therapeutic Youth Services and Rubys, Uniting Communities

History and Background
Uniting Communities’ Rubys program has been operating for over 23 years. Four Rubys sites across South Australia work with young people who are at risk of homelessness because they are in conflict with their families. The program is unique in that it provides safe accommodation to the young person while working with the whole family unit to explore solutions to reduce family conflict. This includes weekly counselling and individual therapeutic support. Rubys also plays an important role in Adelaide’s youth homelessness sector, providing safe accommodation while assessing a young person’s ability to return home rather than needlessly entering the homelessness sector and becoming trapped within a cycle of homelessness. This enables homelessness services to ensure they are only accommodating young people who are truly unable to return home.

In 2012, Uniting Communities rebranded itself. Previously known as UnitingCare Wesley Adelaide, our new name brought a new requirement — to ensure that ‘everyday community engagement’ was part of our service provision in every program. As an organisation, we were challenged to do more to ensure our clients were engaged in their communities, recognising that breaking down social isolation and increasing community participation would assist clients to have better, longer term outcomes.

Alinsky and the Fit with Rubys
At Rubys we were clear about how we worked at both an individual and family level with each client. The next challenge was how to use the uniqueness and success of the Rubys program to provide an extra level of support to young people at risk of homelessness; a layer of support that focused on young people being able to access the benefits of community participation. As the Coordinator of one of the Rubys houses, we knew we had an opportunity to ensure community engagement became embedded in the Rubys model and research led us to the work of Saul Alinsky.1 Some of his key principles fit well with the service values and model we were already implementing at Rubys, and it was a natural fit to see how we could put his theories into practice.

Alinsky spoke of respecting a person’s dignity and trusting people to do what’s best for themselves, not what we think is best. When we respect the dignity of people, they cannot be denied the elementary right to participate fully in the solutions to their own problems. To give people help while denying them a significant part in the action, contributes nothing to the development of the individual. This concept naturally fits with the way in which Rubys has always considered that the young person and family are experts of their own story. Fundamental to our model is our belief that work should be client-led.

Diagram 1. Rubys has expanded from working with clients at the individual and family level, to assisting them to participate in their community

Power = Change, Participation = Empowerment
Alinsky was concerned with how to create communities and organisations that enabled a change in the balance of power. He believed the ‘have-nots’ are barred from an opportunity to represent themselves in the politics of life and must organise in order to gain power. Alinsky describes power as active citizen participation pulsing upward, providing a unified strength for a common purpose — without this power you cannot achieve change.

Reflection on this theory led us to ask why many of the young people we work with are at risk and to conclude that it is because they do not have the power to achieve the change they desire and they are unable to participate within their communities to get that power. Simply put, our

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current community structures do not allow young people to participate — this leads to disempowerment and no ability to change their circumstances. Alinsky believed that when people are given an opportunity or power to participate in their lives, they are empowered to achieve change. It was clear, our role should be to give young people this opportunity.

**Starting Out: Giving Young People the Ability to Participate**

Five young people who resided at Rubys were all struggling with issues within the education system. All five young people had approached their school, received one on one support but still reported feeling alone, isolated and experiencing low self-esteem. They had all been labelled ‘at risk’ due to the responses and behaviours they had used to cope with their feelings. Each one was unaware that the others they were living with at Rubys were experiencing the same issue or the commonality of their experiences.

We realised that because we have a unique program, we also have a unique opportunity to support these young people to ‘organise’ together and create a community at Rubys in which they can participate and discover their power. This situation led to our first community initiative known as Eddy Education — the young people were asked to explore together what an ideal ‘place of learning’ would look like and were given the opportunity to create that within Rubys Edwardstown. Each Monday young people continue to support each other through conversation about difficulties they face at school.

**Developing an Organised Community Structure at Rubys**

Rubys’ second venture into developing a youth-led community initiative came through feedback from teenagers who were not concerned with education but were more worried about gaining employment. These young people stated that they wanted a community initiative that allowed them to volunteer to gain experience, but wanted the support of staff alongside them. In discussion with young people about how this could happen, staff contacted two local, not-for-profit businesses who were more than willing to provide this opportunity to young people. Thus Rubys Resume building became our second community initiative — ensuring that any young person at Rubys who is not currently attending school has the option of participating in a meaningful activity. When two young people gained employment in the wider community we realised that our ‘practice’ community participation at Rubys really had become a springboard to wider community participation for our clients.

We began to encourage young people to develop their own activities by utilising our resources and a community structure soon began to form within Rubys. We began a process of linking lives to create momentum and power that did not previously exist — every initiative was unique just like the young people at Rubys.

**Organising Around Self-Interest**

Alinsky spoke of a community organiser’s ability to discover the self-interest of a person. At Rubys we found this was the key to developing community initiatives with young people. We began to explore what a young person can get out of being involved in community; recognition, new skills, respect, excitement, social activity, a chance to create change, an opportunity to explore a new identity or employment option, the satisfaction of showing others what they can achieve, or new friends with similar interests. When we were able to determine the young person’s self-interest we could then shape a community initiative to help the young person achieve their personal goals.

We gave the young person the chance to dream about how they could get others involved in their interest if given the chance — our role was then to do our best to facilitate initiatives that actually gave them that chance. We combined the young person’s passion with our resources, to create an opportunity for them to practice. We discovered that all young people have a passion — not all young people have the opportunity.

The role of the worker thus became that of an organiser. Facilitating and organising the members of the group/initiative — providing support, guidance, resources, information and even training to increase the power of the young people within the community initiative and providing the young people with choices and options in how they may lead and develop that initiative.

**Diagram 2. A selection of activities at one Rubys house**

| **Emerald St Advisory Group** | A group of ex-clients who we use to consult with about ideas and initiatives |
| **Eddy Education** | Clients meet on a Monday to discuss issues they are having at school and how to find solutions |
| **Planet Rubys** | Clients who are concerned about climate change and the environment organise initiatives to make a positive impact |
| **United Basketball team** | A team of clients, ex-clients and workers who play in a local social competition |
| **Rubys resumé building** | A group of activities, often volunteering, for clients that want to gain experience to put on their resumé, so they can get employment |
| **She’s My Hero** | Weekly discussion focussing on a high-achieving woman; promotes equal rights and highlights sexism in the wider community |
Leaders Within an Organised Rubys Community

Alinsky believed that it is not the role of the ‘organiser’ to lead the community. Instead we must find the leaders within a community and allow them to lead.

At Rubys we discovered our leaders in the form of ex-clients who had expressed interest in volunteering in order to give back to the program that had supported them. Our relationships with these young people allowed us to form our most important community initiative: the Emerald Street Advisory group. The advisory group is currently made of six young people who have been through the Rubys program and now at the age of 18 or 19 want to find a way to contribute to the current group of young people at Rubys. Staff facilitate the opportunity for the group to meet monthly and discuss the progress and direction of the community initiatives that exist within the house. Their role is to advise on each of the community initiatives to ensure that they remain client led.

To further empower these young people we have made them official volunteers at Uniting Communities; this provides them access to training opportunities and several have expressed an interest in working in this field.

Rubys is now looking to emulate similar unique community initiatives within each of its four sites and expand the Rubys community. We are incredibly excited and energised by the work of empowering young people to become active in their communities and see our role being to provide them with those first steps and experiences. But it has been a massive learning curve; as Alinsky states, effective community organising is as much an educational process for the organiser as it is for the people with whom they are working.

Endnotes
Opinion
Donna Bennett
Chief Executive Officer, Hope Street Youth and Family Services

As CEO I have embedded within the culture of Hope Street the principles of community development as the core driver of partnerships and relationships within communities when responding to youth homelessness locally. A strong demonstration of this is the leadership Hope Street has taken in achieving significant resources for the development of the Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Melton.

Hope Street became a member of the City of Melton community in 2009 with the delivery of specialist youth homelessness outreach support services and later supported accommodated services as a part of the Support for Young People that Really Count Victorian Government funded initiative targeting under-resourced growth corridors. Due to our presence in the local community it became evident that youth homelessness was a major issue that was projected to grow simultaneously with the population of Melton. Given the socio-economic demographic of the City of Melton and no youth specialist crisis support or accommodation response within the local government area (the nearest located 27kms from Melton) it was evident that Victorian Government resources were critical to the solution.

As the only specialist youth homelessness agency in the City of Melton Hope Street embraced the responsibility to broadly identify and frame the issue as well as broadly identify a solution and strategy to address the issue. This marked the beginning of a purposeful campaign. Given the resources required to build and establish a youth homelessness crisis support and accommodation service I knew this could only succeed with strong community support and genuine ownership of the campaign/project.

Given Hope Street’s expertise our role was then to facilitate awareness of youth homelessness in the local community including causes and the impact on young people and children experiencing homelessness. Developing the community’s awareness of the solutions and benefits to responding and preventing young people experiencing homelessness was just as critical as informing the community of the damaging consequences of youth homelessness. Likewise, Hope Street’s campaign included raising community awareness about how youth homelessness affects individuals, families, schools, businesses, agencies, Victoria Police, local government, Victorian Government and so on.

Equally important was highlighting the necessity to invest in the local community to enable interventions that would provide meaningful and lasting benefits in addressing youth homelessness.

The people and groups impacted then became the stakeholders of this campaign. Facilitated discussions about solutions then occurred and how they could be achieved including exploring specific actions different members of the community could undertake.

Once again as solutions and actions were explored, the stakeholders grew, encompassing service clubs, local newspapers and radio. The Hope Street vision soon developed into a shared vision of what the community wanted to achieve. This was done via consultative processes involving a facilitated workshop, many meetings and presentations to groups, clubs, businesses and Victorian Members of Parliament. Young people were central to the campaign and were engaged via consultation, research, interviews with the local media and as guest speakers at targeted events.

In the interest of transparency and accountability an Advisory Committee was established with Terms of Reference providing a governance structure to the campaign. The Advisory Committee provided valuable connections to other community members, knowledge about processes, practical hands on support, in kind resources such as hosting a Corporate Breakfast, specialist skills and advice, for example marketing, focus and highly motivated energy with a ‘can do approach’ to make this work. This infectious energy recognised that each member brought a different skill, knowledge base, and connections to the campaign.

It also recognised that collectively the community was in a stronger position to succeed with achieving the vision.

Some of the critical elements central to the success of the campaign have been:
• building on relationships that Hope Street developed since first becoming a member of the local community in 2009
• providing leadership and a strong presence (as a member of the local community) thus demonstrating our commitment to the local community
identifying and engaging key community leaders and stakeholders (including young people who experience homelessness) in the discussion of the issue and to develop a shared solution
- understanding the expertise, strengths and abilities of key community leaders and stakeholders and enabling them to utilise these attributes
- jointly acting on the advice of community leaders and stakeholders
- resourcing and supporting community leaders and stakeholders when required
- facilitating effective communication including consultation, planning, informing, problem solving, developing agreements
- following through on agreements and completion of tasks.

Hope Street also led the campaign with investment of resources such as CEO and Executive Management time (lots of this), funds, research, relationships outside of Melton, promotion, bringing additional resources into Melton for new services. This was critical to the demonstration of our commitment to the community and to addressing youth homelessness within the local community.

The response from the community of Melton has been overwhelmingly positive with an unwavering commitment to take action and address the needs of local vulnerable young people. The extensive nature of the community engagement necessary to achieve this encompassed: the City of Melton Council early in the campaign providing in-principle support to provide land for the Hope Street First Response Youth Service to be built; local Member of Parliament Don Nardella providing information and advice, informing government colleagues, attending joint meetings; Khalil Eideh Member for Western Metropolitan for also informing government colleagues; Natalie Hutchins writing a letter to the Minister for Housing supporting the vision; young people sharing experiences via research, the local media and special events; Raine and Horne Real Estate entering into a Pilot project and presenting on the model at the National Housing Conference in Perth; Gandel Philanthropy for supporting the piloting of an innovative model in the City of Melton; Bunnings in Melton consistently participating in and donating to activities; TabCorp Park conducting a Corporate Breakfast, hosting all Advisory Committee meetings and hosting a City of Melton Service Clubs dinner to promote the campaign; Service Clubs welcoming Hope Street to speak at meetings and events as well as providing grants; Woodgrove Shopping Centre nominating Hope Street as Charity of Choice for two years, marketing the campaign and supporting fundraising events; the Melton Leader for instigating a partnership promoting the campaign; the Star Weekly for also promoting the campaign and being a member of the Advisory Committee; the members of the Hope Street Corporate Committee contributing via marketing, event management, fundraising, wider community connections, advice, attending meetings including with the Minister for Housing; local builders/developers including Varcon Group and Victoria Investments and Properties contributing their expertise as members of committees; and much more.

The other key stakeholder is the Victorian Government. While already in partnership with Hope Street with the funding of existing specialist homelessness services to young people and their children, engaging the Government in this campaign and vision was critical. Aware of our limitations, the community of Melton and Hope Street could not realise this vision alone. To succeed required the social vision, financial and expert contribution of the State Government as a partner in the construction, establishment and delivery of the Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Melton. As outlined in the Community Investment with Hope article by Service Development Manager Bruce Tucker in this edition, Hope Street succeeded in securing this partnership.

In partnership with the community of Melton and the Victorian Government the vision of establishing the Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Melton has significantly progressed to the stage of planning the construction of the facility and preparing for the roll out of initial services. In my opinion this is the result of extensive community engagement and ownership achieved with robust community development. Hope Street’s investment of time, communication, effort, relationships and resources were essential for this locally led response to youth homelessness in the City of Melton. The success of this campaign however is the result of a truly collaborative community effort. I commend the community of Melton for their compassion, action and drive to support their local young people and young families.
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