

Everybody's Business

What local government can do to end homelessness

By Leanne Mitchell

2019 Jack Brockhoff Foundation Churchill Fellowship to investigate how councils can respond to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community.



Winston
Churchill Trust
Learn globally, inspire locally.



THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

What Local Government can do to end homelessness

Report by Leanne Mitchell, Churchill Fellow

2019 Jack Brockhoff Foundation Churchill Fellowship to investigate how councils can respond to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community.

United Kingdom | United States of America | Canada

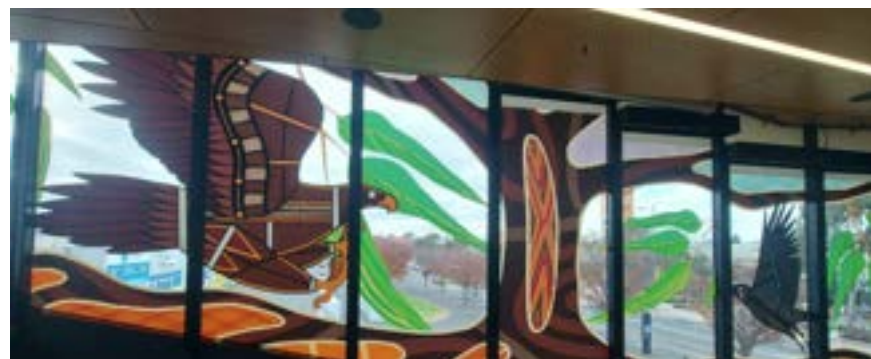
Front cover image: We all deserve a healthy and safe community 2016. Hospitality house, Clarion Alley Mural Project. San Francisco

Key terms: homelessness, rough sleeping, prevention, housing, poverty, lived experience, local government, council, mayor, collaboration, partnership, engagement, codesign.

Indemnity Clause: I understand that the Churchill Trust may publish this report, either in hard copy or on the Internet or both, and consent to such publication. I indemnify the Churchill Trust against any loss, costs, or damages it may suffer arising out of any claim or proceedings made against the Trust in respect of or arising out of the publication of any report submitted to the Trust and which the Trust places on a website for access over the internet. I also warrant that my Final Report is original and does not infringe the copyright of any person, or contain anything which is, or the incorporation of which into the final report is, actionable for defamation, a breach of any privacy law or obligation, breach of confidence, contempt of court, passing-off or contravention of any other private right or of any law.

h. Mitchell

Dated: March 2023



I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I live and work in Melbourne, Australia and pay my respect to Wurundjeri Elders past, present and emerging. I am grateful to be on these lands and express my sorrow for impacts of colonisation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples throughout these lands, including socio-economic injustice, displacement, and discrimination. Sovereignty has never been ceded.

A celebration of Wurundjeri culture by Thomas (Tom) Day in the Brimbank Community and Civic centre

CONTENTS

| | |
|----|--|
| 04 | Acknowledgements |
| 05 | About the author |
| 05 | About this report |
| 06 | Key terms |
| 07 | Acronyms |
| 08 | Executive summary |
| 10 | Introduction |
| 12 | Homelessness – a snapshot |
| 14 | The challenges councils face |
| 17 | The government worker experience |
| 20 | Case study – The challenges of a local government worker |
| 22 | Guidelines for local government |

KNOW YOUR LOCAL HOMELESSNESS SITUATION

| | |
|----|---|
| 23 | 1. Collect local data |
| 24 | 2. Listen to your community. |
| 25 | 3. Establish a shared definition of homelessness |
| 26 | Case study – Legislative Theatre provides a new stage for codesigned strategies |
| 27 | Case study – Making homelessness everyone's business in Manchester |

LEAD THE NARRATIVE AND DRIVE COLLABORATION

| | |
|----|--|
| 29 | 4. Nurture community alliances |
| 30 | 5. Embrace lived experiences |
| 31 | 6. Involve all parts of government |
| 32 | 7. Collaborate to address welfare, safety and amenity |
| 33 | 8. Communicate and educate for better outcomes |
| 34 | Case study – Homelessness charter brings Leicester's community together |
| 35 | Case study – A combined council response to homelessness in Greater Manchester |
| 36 | Case study – Bringing lived experience into the San Francisco Public Library |
| 38 | Case study – San Francisco's Healthy Streets Operations Centre |



ORGANISE YOUR APPROACH AND YOUR WORKFORCE

| | |
|----|---|
| 40 | 9. Build a collaborative strategy |
| 41 | 10. Lead and influence good giving initiatives |
| 42 | 11. Structure your teams for success |
| 43 | 12. Involve your mayor and senior management |
| 44 | 13. Re-think and realign budgets |
| 45 | Case study – A team geared for response in Lambeth |
| 46 | Case study – Alliancing removes financial barriers and strengthens partnerships |

ACT TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

| | |
|----|--|
| 49 | 14. Do what you can to influence housing supply |
| 50 | 15. Re-focus prevention |
| 52 | 16. Bring in your libraries – and other customer service staff |
| 54 | 17. Know what you can offer in crisis response |
| 57 | Case study – Improving service coordination programs through changing futures |
| 58 | Case study – A model for prevention in Newcastle |
| 60 | Case study – In Baltimore, peer recovery specialists bring lived experience into libraries |
| 62 | Case study – Urban Alchemy: Transforming the energy in traumatised urban spaces |
| 62 | Case study – Transforming the energy in traumatised urban spaces |
| 64 | Case study – Homelessness and encampments – Halifax's response |
| 66 | Conclusions and recommendations |
| 69 | Itinerary |
| 70 | Meetings |
| 74 | Implementation and dissemination |

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, thank you to the Winston Churchill Trust and Jack Brockhoff foundation for awarding me this Fellowship and allowing me the opportunity to learn so deeply. Thanks also to my employer, Brimbank City Council and particularly Lynley Dumble and Fiona Blair for giving me the time and support to allow it to happen.

After receiving this Fellowship in 2019 and cancelling my travels in 2020, I finally got on the road in 2022. It was a long time coming and I am extremely grateful to a bunch of people who encouraged me and helped me as I scoped my topic, moulded my pitch, developed itineraries, developed itineraries again, begged for contacts and found my way around.

Thanks Sherri Bruinhout, Jenny Smith, Sian Mulgrew, and Churchill Fellows Lucy Adams and Leanne Hodyl for your help from the start as my referees, mentors and ideas trust.

Over an eight-week period, from September to November 2022, I met up with more than 90 incredible people and conducted more than 50 interviews. I had not met even one of these people before I embarked on this Fellowship journey and their generosity in making the time to sit down and talk, to take me around and introduce me to their own contacts truly warmed my heart and reinforced my faith in the goodness of humans. Thank you!

There were also a few people who were extremely generous with their knowledge and especially their contact books who, unfortunately, I never got to meet in person. Thank you, Lydia Stazen, Michelle Binfield, David Kidd, Rian Watts, Lorraine McGrath (it was great to meet you for a minute), Beth Wahler, Sarah Johnson. We will meet sometime, I am sure!

Thanks to Trina Jones and Prof. Cameron Parsell for taking time out of their busy schedules to review and provide such valuable (and appreciated) feedback on my draft report. And a special thank you to Ali Duncan, not only for reviewing my report, but mostly for taking the time over the years to listen, teach and support me as I ventured (stumbled) into the world of local government homelessness response. Many thanks also to my friend Joe Ferrara for your graphic design expertise, which has lifted this all up a notch and my lovely niece Rebecca Mitchell who did a wicked job copy

editing this report on short deadlines.

And finally, thanks to my partner, Ram, for your smart thinking, cool head and quiet faith in me, and to my daughter Zara and sister Helene for jumping on the plane and being my constant companions and calming influence during the trip. It was wonderful to have a little bit of home and a good laugh as we ventured back into the big wide world. 🌍



L-R Helene,
Leanne and Zara



THE AUTHOR



I am an Australian government worker, writer and anthropologist, convinced that we can all do better to make the world a fairer place.

My work and study over the last two decades - across government, the United Nations and the not-for-profit sector - has allowed me to examine homelessness in many different forms, from working with people displaced because of natural disaster or large-scale development projects to those without shelter in inner-city locations.

In Australia, managing homelessness programs for the City of Melbourne and Brimbank City Council exposed me to the scope of responsibility and many limitations faced by local government in responding to street sleeping.

In 2019, I was awarded a [Churchill Fellowship](https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/) to investigate how councils can respond to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community. I undertook the Fellowship from September to November 2022. In my travels I met with councils and partner organisations in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada.

My aim through this work is to build a new body of knowledge for councils and develop guidelines for practical use in Australia, to be shared with colleagues and collaborators around the world.

CONTACT LEANNE

Churchill Trust fellows page: <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellow/leanne-mitchell-vic-2019/>

Local Government and homelessness blog: <https://localgovernmenthomelessness.blogspot.com/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/leanne-mitchell-aus/>

Email: lghomelessness@outlook.com

THE REPORT

The 2019 Jack Brockhoff Foundation Churchill Fellowship to investigate how councils can respond to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community.

Over a period of eight weeks, I conducted more than 50 interviews, speaking to around 90 people working in government, homelessness services, peak bodies and media in the UK, USA and Canada.

I am very aware that, when looking at homelessness and local government systems in these countries, I am not comparing apples with apples.

The scale of homelessness, our allocated and mandated roles and responsibilities, the legal contexts and available budgets were quite different, but still, many of our experiences as government workers were similar. It was interesting to see how much we actually have in common in relation to the work we do, why we do it, the issues we encounter and the ongoing complexities we face.

My focus during this Fellowship was to find and document lessons, challenges and examples of good practice that could add to our knowledge in Australia and potentially be adapted to our circumstances.

Upon applying for this Fellowship, I realised very little information exists about the role local government can play in addressing rough sleeping. I was interested in that aspect of homelessness through my work at the City of Melbourne, as this was the focus of the majority of our efforts.

I am, however, aware that homelessness is wider than just rough sleeping. Through my Fellowship, I came to appreciate that this narrow view of homelessness can limit a council's understanding of its role and response. Hence, I adjusted my scope to look more broadly. (Though, I must admit, much of what I saw and the discussions I had often turned to street homelessness.)

In applying for this Fellowship, my intention was to develop a set of guidelines that councils here in Australia and overseas might use to understand their role in addressing homelessness and how they can improve outcomes for all members of the community. I want this report to be as practical as possible - something that a local government worker can pick up and run with. A place to find ideas and be inspired by good practice. As a result, I have structured this report to include plenty of links to activities and projects I learned about during my travels.

I am also deeply aware of the power of stories and, through a number of case studies, I have captured anecdotes, ideas and actions that inspired me along the way.

We have a lot to do and much to learn from each other - and I hope this report offers a good start.

KEY TERMS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Alliance contracting | → A project or service delivery where there is one contract between the owner/ financier/commissioner and an alliance of parties who deliver the project or service. By having one alliance contract, all parties work to the same outcomes and are signed up to the same success measures. ¹ |
| Assertive outreach | → A persistent and purposeful approach used with people who do not present to, and/or have difficulties engaging with, housing, homelessness or health services. ² |
| Byname list | → A comprehensive list of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real time. Using information collected and shared with their consent, each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, and housing needs. ³ |
| Collective impact | → A collaboration framework that engages across sectors and groups who share a common interest to address a complex social issue in a given community. ⁴ |
| Continuum of Care Program (US) | → A US Government funded program designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. It provides funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and state and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimising the trauma and dislocation caused by homelessness. ⁵ |
| Couch surfing (also sofa surfing) | → A secondary form of homelessness characterised by moving from shelter to shelter, often with friends or acquaintances, but with no fixed address. ⁶ |
| Encampment | → Places where a group of individuals experiencing homelessness reside that is not intended for longterm, continuous occupancy. ⁷ |
| Human rights | → Rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. ⁸ |
| Homelessness | → When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or• has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or• does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations. ⁹ |
| Lived experience | → Someone with a personal experience of (homelessness, mental illhealth, use of alcohol or other drugs, or a family member and/or carer who has experience in supporting someone. |
| Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning | → Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) is a policy by which a certain percentage of social and affordable housing must be included within all new housing projects. This can be expressed in terms of land, dwellings or payment of an equivalent levy allocated to such housing. ¹⁰ |
| NIMBY | → Acronym for ‘not in my back yard’. In the context of this report, it refers to the act of opposing the location of a service or building based on perceived negative impacts on the local surroundings. |
| Poverty | → Having a lack of resources or money to fulfil immediate basic needs – such as food, housing or clothing – and for longterm savings or wealth. ¹¹ |
| Rough sleeping | → Anyone who is living on the streets, sleeping in parks, or squatting in derelict buildings for temporary shelter. ¹² |
| Service coordination | → Collaborative approach undertaken by a number of service partners that aims to link individuals experiencing homelessness with organisations and services appropriate to their needs. |

ACRONYMS

| | |
|----------|---|
| AAEH | → Australian Alliance to End Homelessness |
| ABS | → Australian Bureau of Statistics |
| AHURI | → Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute |
| AIHW | → Australian Institute of Health and Welfare |
| AtoZ | → Advance to Zero |
| BHB | → Big Housing Build |
| BFZ | → Built for Zero |
| BRC | → Bowery Residents Committee |
| CAEH | → Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness |
| CCCLM | → Australian Council of Capital City Lord Mayors |
| CHP | → Community Housing Provider |
| COC | → Continuum of Care |
| CS | → Community Solutions |
| DC ICH | → District of Columbia Interagency Council on Homelessness |
| DHSH | → Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing |
| H2H | → From Homelessness to a Home |
| HRA | → Homelessness Reduction Act |
| FZ | → Functional Zero |
| GLA | → Greater London Authority |
| GMCH | → Greater Manchester Combined Authority |
| HASA | → Health and Safety Associate |
| HSOC | → Healthy Streets Operations Centre |
| HMIS | → Homeless Management Information System |
| HUD | → US Department of Housing and Urban Development |
| IGH | → Institute of Global Homelessness |
| NHHA | → National Housing and Homelessness Agreement |
| NIMBY | → Not in my back yard |
| NYC | → New York City |
| PIT | → Point in Time Count |
| SHS | → Specialist Homelessness Service |
| UA | → Urban Alchemy |
| UK | → United Kingdom |
| UN | → United Nations |
| US | → United States of America |
| USICH | → United States Interagency Council on Homelessness |
| VI-SPDAT | → Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool |

¹ <https://lhalliances.org.uk/what-is-alliancing/>
² <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Assertive-outreach-resource.pdf>
³ <https://community.solutions/what-is-a-by-name-list/>
⁴ <https://socialoutcomes.com.au/toolkit/collective-impact/>
⁵ <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/>
⁶ <https://vincentcare.org.au/news/latest-news/hidden-homelessness-the-realities-couch-surfing/>
⁷ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Understanding-Encampments.pdf>
⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/human-rights>
⁹ <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/about-homelessness/>
¹⁰ https://theconstellationproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Mandatory_Inclusionary_Zoning-Final.pdf
¹¹ <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/what-we-do/ending-homelessness/poverty-australia-statistics>
¹² <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/explainer-rough-sleeping>

Everybody's Business

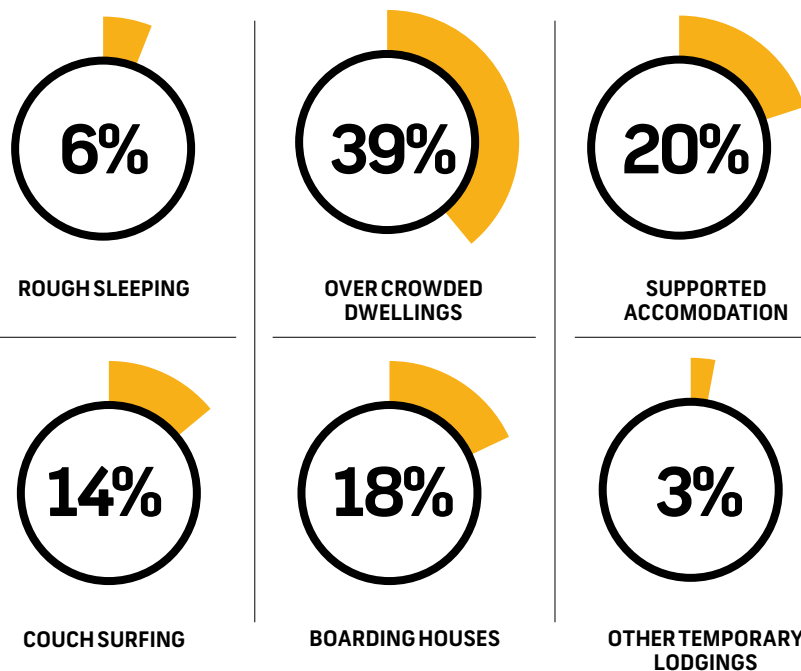


THE SITUATION

122,494

people estimated homeless in Australia

- Australia has no agreed definition of homelessness and no national plan.
- Social housing stock is low across the country.
- More parts of Australia- cities and regional areas - are feeling the impacts of homelessness.
- Major funding agreements on housing and homelessness are held between federal and state governments.
- Local government has no defined role in responding to homelessness.
- Communities often expect their councils to 'do something' about homelessness.



The challenges councils face

The pressures of managing multiple responsibilities and interests. Sometimes areas of responsibility conflict.

A lack of mandate and no guidance regarding the role councils can play

Limited access to funds

A focus on crisis and missing upstream prevention opportunities

Response activities and budgets are siloed, limiting the ability to respond effectively

Navigating politics and political cycles that don't necessarily align with the timeframes needed for effective homelessness response

Balancing the use of public spaces

The challenges government workers face

Staff carry high workloads and receive relatively low pay

Balancing the needs and rights of people experiencing homelessness against responsibilities to the wider community

Building understanding and managing expectations regarding homelessness and response activities

Navigating the politics and community expectations of politicians

Making hard decisions and fighting for them can be a challenge in a bureaucratic establishment



"Homelessness is just an experience and not who you are...it is not a criminal activity, not a misfortune. It is people who are going through an experience at a point in time."

JOSLYN CARTER, NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES

AT A GLANCE OF ALL PEOPLE ESTIMATED HOMELESS ON CENSUS NIGHT 2021:

23% were aged between 12 and 24

14% were children under 12

44% were women

One in five was Indigenous

GUIDELINES

What can local government do?

KNOW YOUR LOCAL HOMELESSNESS SITUATION

- **Collect local data:** Know your local homelessness situation. Collect data in your area and use that to make your decisions about what to do next.
- **Listen to your community:** Take time to listen and learn from your community. Know what they are doing and build your approach with them.
- **Establish a shared definition of homelessness:** Work with your partners and agree on how you jointly define homelessness. This will help align your work.

LEAD THE NARRATIVE AND DRIVE COLLABORATION

- **Nurture community alliances:** As a council, carefully consider your role in local collaborations. If the opportunity arises step back and let the community lead.
- **Embrace lived experiences:** Look to people with a lived experience of homelessness to partner in and inform your work. They will bring a perspective and an ability to connect that you may not be able to access in other ways.
- **Involve all parts of government:** Consider which government partners will be most important to you in addressing homelessness locally and bring those people together.
- **Collaborate to address welfare, safety and amenity:** Establish coordinated partnership responses with agreed goals and well-defined roles and responsibilities.
- **Communicate and educate for better outcomes:** Councils have the connections and the means to change perceptions of homeless. Make the time to tell the story.

ORGANISE YOUR APPROACH AND YOUR WORKFORCE

- **Build a collaborative strategy:** Develop a homelessness strategy, but make sure it is not just yours. A genuine approach to collaboration will see

**KNOW
YOUR LOCAL
HOMELESSNESS
SITUATION**

**LEAD
THE NARRATIVE AND
DRIVE
COLLABORATION**

**ORGANISE
YOUR APPROACH AND
YOUR WORKFORCE**

**ACT
TO PREVENT AND END
HOMELESSNESS**

better outcomes for the whole community.

- **Lead good giving initiatives:** Be prepared to have tough conversations with your community about on-street giving. Conversations about alternative ways of helping can redirect goodwill and see better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.
- **Structure your teams for success:** Working in homelessness is hard. Support your staff by establishing a clear understanding of your goals and shared values.
- **Involve your mayor and senior management:** Equip your mayor and councillors with knowledge and information and involve them in your homelessness efforts to tell your local story and build support for your efforts.
- **Rethink and realign budgets:** Tight budgets may become the fundamental barrier to councils taking action on homelessness. Look for funding opportunities internally and assign funds where you can. Some lobbying of State and Commonwealth to increase their funding.

ACT TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

- **Know what you can do to influence housing supply:** Use planning powers to control and direct influence over your housing supply. Ensure collaboration between council planners and homelessness service staff to align efforts and create more opportunities.
- **Refocus prevention:** Make the most of the community connection points that councils hold and build organisational-wide responsibility for upstream interventions that prevent homelessness.
- **Bring in your libraries and other customer service staff:** Recognise the value of your colleagues who work with your community but are not the homelessness 'experts'. With the right training and support they can help identify and respond to homelessness.
- **Know what you can offer in crisis response:** Local Government is in a good position to convene on-the ground crisis response. Know where you can add value and take an informed, human rights approach that considers the needs of all members of your community.

Recommendations for local government

1 Make homelessness everyone's business.

Utilise Local Government's ability to connect across sectors and bring together a community, recognising that not one group or person can solve a complex problem like homelessness. Rather, a collective approach will yield better results. This also recognises that there are diverse views about homelessness, and negotiation may be required to find acceptable ways to work together.

2 Focus on homelessness beyond rough sleeping.

While street homelessness is the most visible and vulnerable experience of homelessness and obviously requires action, local government is equipped to respond to a broader experience of homelessness.

3 Recognise what you can do to prevent homelessness.

Through its structure and close connections to community, Local Government can play a much wider role in homelessness prevention. Take time to identify what factors will most likely lead to homelessness in your community. Identify the customer service points - where connection with people at risk of homelessness might take place and connect with them before they hit crisis point.

4 Educate and change the narrative.

Building understanding and empathy will go a long way. Local Government is in a good position to get the story straight on homelessness, its origins and how it impacts individuals, families and the broader community. Use your close connection to the community to educate people on the causes and impacts of homelessness on individuals and the community at-large.

5 Take your seat at the table.

Lobby Commonwealth and State Governments to recognise Local Government's unique offering in responding to and ending homelessness. Future national and state level homelessness plans should include local government as a key partner. To back this up, funds need to be made available to local councils to coordinate data collection, prevention and collaboration efforts.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2016, literally over the period of just a few weeks, homelessness – specifically, rough sleeping – became a very visible issue in Melbourne.

At the time I'd been managing the City of Melbourne's homelessness team for a few months. Our team was a small group of mainly social workers, neatly enveloped in a section of the council that focused on the welfare of city communities.

We delivered a homelessness strategy that committed to develop sustainable pathways out of homelessness and our work was embedded in a protocol aligned to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

While many in the community understood the tough situation people faced in the city with the rising cost of living, lower housing affordability and less community and health supports available, others saw things differently.

When the first complaints were raised – and they were very legitimate concerns – from business owners, residents and visitors about access to property, safety and amenity we made every effort to respond respectfully.

Very early on we saw that we had to work widely with a broad range of stakeholders, including our own city cleaning services, park patrols, building surveyors and local laws teams, as well as a number of homelessness agencies in the city.

A few months later, a major city newspaper started a campaign, running front page stories demanding Council take action to remove any indication of homelessness off the streets.

What followed over the next year included a sit in protest by people experiencing homelessness at City Square, heightened attention on groups sleeping outside Flinders Street Station and the Council introducing a review of the city's local laws. These changes aimed to limit how people used the streets and potentially fine people for rough sleeping in the city.

That was a confronting time for our small team, but a community engagement process we ran allowed more than 3000 people to tell us that Melbourne was a caring city and not one that criminalised homelessness.

The thing I learned through the experience was this: while councils tend to find themselves at the forefront of response, we are often illequipped to meet the complexities of individual situations and are frequently torn by conflicting responsibilities.

Rough sleeping happens on our streets and many people expect us to do something about it.

Paradoxically, we are often held account for doing too much and for not doing enough.



While councils tend to find themselves at the forefront of homelessness response, we are often ill-equipped to meet the complexities of individual situations and are frequently torn by conflicting responsibilities.

In talking to counterparts in other parts of Victoria and around Australia, I realised that our predicament was not unique. While there is some information available about the role councils play in addressing homelessness, there is very little about how we navigate these internal operating challenges that sit at the core of what we aim to do.

Councils in the inner city, outer suburban, and rural and regional areas will also experience and respond to homelessness in different ways.

This is what ignited my interest in applying for a Churchill Fellowship – to find out how councils overseas operate within their functional limitations, balance multiple and often conflicting responsibilities and collaborate successfully.

Through my Fellowship, I had the opportunity to visit the UK, US and Canada to compare the various ways that councils are responding to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community.

I asked international colleagues, working in government, the notforprofit sector, in universities, the media and peak bodies, how they thought local government can navigate the complexities of homelessness internally and use collaboration and partnerships to foster better outcomes.

I have written this report for local government colleagues in Australia, who work in many different ways to address homelessness and whose experiences and knowledge will be very different. The intention is that you can flick through to find the actions specific to you own needs and use some of the ideas gathered to educate and advocate in this space. ☺



Melbourne media 2016-17

When it comes to housing and homelessness the feds have the money, the province has the jurisdiction, and the cities have the problem."

MIKE SAVAGE, MAYOR OF HALIFAX, CANADA¹³

¹³ June 2022. From <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/fcm-2022-homelessness-housing-affordability-1.6475742>

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness – a snapshot

NO DEFINITION, NO PLAN

Australia has no single, official definition of homelessness and no national plan or strategy for addressing it. The lack of a common definition and with no joint plan to address it, means actions by government, services and the community to address homelessness (in all its forms) risk being misaligned and ineffective.

In 2022, the new Federal Government announced intentions to develop a national [homelessness plan](#).

Homelessness Australia lists a selection of definitions. The one that is most commonly used – and the closest we have to an official definition – is by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It was developed for the purposes of the Census of Population and Housing and focuses on the lack of one or more elements that represent a ‘home’.

The ABS statistical definition of homelessness is “... when a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives, they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate;
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to, space for social relations.” (ABS, 2012)¹⁴

By this definition, a person may be considered homeless if they sleep rough in an open place (rough sleeping) or in a vehicle, stay on a temporary basis with other households (couch surf), live in supported accommodation for people who are homeless, live in a boarding house (rooming house) or other temporary lodgings, or live in severely crowded dwellings. In this report, I refer to homelessness generally as encompassing all these situations, and ‘rough sleeping’ or ‘unhoused’ to refer to people living on the streets, in parks or in other public places.

For First Nations communities, homelessness can be rooted in dispossession from land and country. With the high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness, a cultural lens is an important consideration in defining homelessness. “For Indigenous Australians, homelessness can be spiritual and is a result of being disconnected from one’s homeland, separated from family or kinship networks, or not being familiar with one’s cultural heritage.” (Brackertz et al. 2018; Memmott et al. 2004) ¹⁶

IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Like a number of places around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic proved in Australia that government action can impact homelessness. When homelessness became a public health issue,

government across Australia rapidly demonstrated what could be done to house and support people.

The legacy of this action resulted in commitments by a few State governments to increase investment in social and affordable housing and invest in other activities to get people into suitable accommodation. However, the fact remains that many other actions taken were time and budget limited, with no long-term commitment to continue post-pandemic.

HOMELESSNESS RATES AND CAUSES

Australia’s last [Census](#), was undertaken on and around 10 August 2021, when parts of New South Wales and Victoria were under COVID lockdown. Parts of Queensland and the ACT also experienced some lockdowns before and after the census date. The Census estimates on people experiencing homelessness or marginally housed we released 19 months later in March 2023.

Australia has no other nation-wide homelessness count and while the limitations of Census information in this space was already apparent, the 2021 Census was compromised in many ways.

As the only source of nation-wide information on homelessness, Census data is important, however what we have ended up with in 2023 does point to the need for better sources. Noting limitations, I refer here to top line Census figures to set the scene on homelessness in Australia.

The Census estimated nearly one in 200 people – a total of 122,494 across the country – without a safe, secure place to sleep at night. This was an overall increase of 5.2% on 2016. In 2021, the rate of homelessness in Australia was 48 for every 10,000 people, down from 50 in 2016.







The 2021 Census recorded fewer people sleeping rough (7636 in 2021, compared to 8,200 in 2016) and less living in severely crowded dwellings or staying temporarily with other households. However, more people were recorded staying in supported accommodation and boarding houses.

The estimates noted that males made up 55.9% of people experiencing homelessness (68,516) and females 44.1% (53,974). While the number of males increased by 1.6% from 2016, women increased by 10.1% – accounting for more than 80% of the 6,067 increase of people experiencing homelessness in 2021. The largest increases among women in age groups 34–44 (up almost 20% since 2016) and 12–18 (up by almost 18%).

In 2021, almost 25,000 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness, up 6.4% from 2016. This represents one in five (20.4%) of people experiencing homelessness in Australia. ¹⁴

In late 2022, the [Australian Homelessness Monitor](#)

2021 CENSUS – ESTIMATES OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR MARGINALLY HOUSED

| TYPE OF ACCOMMODATION | | TOTAL NUMBERS 2021 | % OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA | % INCREASE BETWEEN 2016–2021 |
|---|--|--------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|
|  | People sleeping rough | 7,636 | 6% | –6.9% |
|  | Person in supported accommodation for the homeless | 24,291 | 20% | +14.4% |
|  | Person staying temporarily with other households | 16,597 | 14% | –6.4% |
|  | Persons living in boarding houses | 22,137 | 18% | +26.5% |
|  | Persons in other temporary lodgings | 3,934 | 3% | +3% ¹⁵ |
|  | Personts in severely crowded dwellings | 47,895 | 39% | –6.3% |

provided a homelessness count based on the average monthly number of specialist homelessness service (SHS) users – another useful source of data. According to these figures, there was an 8 per cent increase in people requesting assistance from services – from 84,800 in 2017–18 to 91,300 in the 2021–22 period. In the same period, homelessness grew at double the rate in regional Australia.

HOUSING

Obviously, you cannot solve homelessness without housing. Rising housing and rental costs and a short supply of social and affordable housing, continues to be at the root of Australia’s housing and homelessness crisis.

Affordability is a key issue around the country. In their 2022 rental affordability snapshot, Anglicare noted that across the board, a lack of affordable rentals is hurting householders on low incomes. No rentals (0 per cent) were affordable for a person looking for work on the JobSeeker payment, 0.1per cent were affordable for a single parent on the Parenting Payment Single and Disability support pension and 0.3 per cent of rentals were affordable for a retiree on the Age Pension.¹⁶

While commitments have been made by the Commonwealth and some State governments, social housing stock around the country remains low, at an expansion rate of 2.6 per cent.

The Homelessness Monitor report says that in the period 2016–2022, expansion “markedly lagged both population (5.7 per cent) and household growth (8.2 per cent). Consequently, the proportionate share of social housing has continued to drift downwards.” ¹⁷

With various state government social housing

SOURCE: ABS, ESTIMATING HOMELESSNESS 2021

initiatives, the monitor estimates a net increase of more than 15,000 homes over the three years 2021–24. Additionally, on the Commonwealth front, the new Labor government has re-engaged with homelessness and housing, committing to a five-year program to construct 20,000 new social housing units and 10,000 affordable rental dwellings.¹⁸

The Commonwealth government also committed to developing Australia’s first [national housing and homelessness plan](#) in 2023.

While housing supply is generally outside the realm of local government, there are actions that councils can take through planning powers to influence the supply of social and affordable housing. Given their position, councils may also experience pressure and backlash from residents and communities who oppose social and affordable housing in their local area and need to be equipped to manage these situations.

NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS AGREEMENT

[The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement](#) (NHHA), is Australia’s primary agreement, through which, the Commonwealth government contributes \$1.6 billion each year to states and territories “to improve access to secure and affordable housing across the housing spectrum”.

The NHHA included \$129 million set aside for homelessness services in 2020–21.¹⁹

States and territories are required to match NHHA funding and, under the agreement, produce “publicly available housing and homelessness strategies and contribute to improved data collection and reporting”.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

As the 2022 Homelessness Monitor noted, local government “is both undefined and unrecognised”.²⁰ However, the 2021 [Parliamentary Enquiry into Homelessness](#), made an important recommendation to include local government involvement.

“The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to develop a more integrated ‘place-based’ approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention.” (Recommendation 27)²¹ ☺

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. Estimating Homelessness: Census: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/2021>
¹⁵ Data for 2021 is not directly comparable with previous Censuses due to improvements in data quality through greater use of administrative data.
¹⁶ Anglicare Australia, Rental Affordability Snapshot, April 2022 <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-National-report.pdf>
¹⁷ Australian Homelessness Monitor 2022: <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/ending-homelessness/research-hub/australian-homelessness-monitor-2022> p.67
¹⁸ Australian Government, Treasury: <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/julie-collins-2022/media-releases/albanese-government-housing-agenda-already-delivering>
¹⁹ Australian Government, Department of Social Services: <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support-programs-services-homelessness/national-housing-and-homelessness-agreement>
²⁰ Australian Homelessness Monitor <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/ending-homelessness/research-hub/australian-homelessness-monitor-2022> p.67
²¹ Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Final Report. Inquiry into homelessness in Australia. July 2021 https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024522/toc_pdf/Finalreport.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

INTRODUCTION

The challenges councils face

While simple geography often places councils at the forefront of homelessness response, Australian local government, and its workforce can be torn by conflicting responsibilities, illequipped to manage both the system's required responses while also navigating the personal interactions they might face.

The most visible form of homelessness, rough sleeping, plays out in a community's streets, parks and other public spaces, and while local government holds very few of the levers, or the money, to take action, community sentiment (and complaints) are often directed Council's way.

To provide a backdrop to what I have learned and the guidelines I will propose, in this section and the next, I will draw on what I heard across multiple interviews about the challenges local government and local government workers face in responding to homelessness.

ABOUT TWENTY BUSINESSES IN ONE

The challenge that local government faces is also enveloped in the unique constitution of councils – being, essentially, one organisation fulfilling many roles, responsible to many different stakeholders.

While known in the general vernacular as the overseers of rates, roads and rubbish, we know that councils can hold responsibility for delivering a range of community health and wellbeing services and undertaking various development activities.

The scope of what local government delivers is wide, and all done under the hat of a single entity. Some departments manage building applications, planning or environmental programs, Australian councils also manage parks and recreational facilities and many oversee libraries and neighbourhood spaces. Councils work with local businesses on economic development, which can include managing events, issuing permits and regulating parking. Given the range of outputs, one council could be considered the equivalent of 20 businesses in one. When responding to homelessness, the number of roles and responsibilities a council holds can lead to internal conflicts, with different parts of a council pursuing different outcomes and the need to balance responsibilities to different sections of a community.

NO MANDATE

There are some areas of council work that are mandated by law and there are others that councils get involved in due to community interest or need.

Homelessness, rough sleeping in particular, happens in local areas and is felt and seen by local communities. Often it leaves many people feeling

uncomfortable and helpless – and they want someone to do something about it.

Because it is local, often the first point of call is the council.

But while councils receive the calls, the complaints and the requests to “do something about it”, often they are ill-equipped to do anything. They lack the money, the expertise and the mandate.

It can be difficult to differentiate perception from fact – it can be hard to say homelessness is not your area of responsibility when people see it locally and you are the local government authority.

And as long as Local Government remains unrecognised for its role and responsibility in the homelessness space, responses can end up being sporadic and uninformed decisions and actions could make the situation worse.

With little idea of what they can do, councils often turn to the only tool in their toolbox – compliance. As Jerry Jones from the US National Alliance to end homelessness succinctly put it: “there is no help or solution available to local government, so the best you can do is manage the problem by cleaning streets.”

In the UK, local authorities have responsibilities mandated by central government. In the US, federal government organisations like the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness drives cross agency efforts, working with city and municipal government, and creates a federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness.

Without a recognised or mandated role, Australian local government remains an outlier in the homelessness response space and, with the exception of a few key locations, levels of response remain uninformed and potentially inadequate. The good news is the Commonwealth Government has made a commitment to build a national housing and homelessness strategy which offers opportunity to get Local Government at the table.

NO MONEY

Sitting closely beside the lack of mandate is the limited access that local government has to the funds

“The role of local government authorities responding to homelessness in Australia is largely unrecognised and undefined. To contribute towards national efforts to end homelessness, the role and opportunities for LGAs need to be made explicit and more coherently integrated within a national strategy”.

KEY RECOMMENDATION – AUSTRALIAN HOMELESSNESS MONITOR 2022 ²²



that are needed to respond to homelessness.

In Australia, Commonwealth and State governments hold the money and the housing stock. And in many states, until recently, investment in housing and on other activities to address homelessness has remained inadequate.

Councils are often on extremely limited budgets (exacerbated in places like Victoria where rate capping is having across the board impacts on spending capacity), and without a defined role to play, have almost nothing to respond with. While a handful of (mainly capital city) councils have prioritised and invested in housing and homelessness responses, many are forced to scrape together funds to meet the minimum requirements.

A lack of money and mandate may result in councils either failing to see what their role might be or claiming they have nothing to contribute in this space. As a result, many intervention opportunities where councils are operating – particularly in the prevention space – may be left unidentified and lost.

A NARROW FOCUS ON HOMELESSNESS

Of the 122,494 people recorded homeless on the night of Australia's last available census in 2021, around 6% were rough sleeping. While it is only the tip of the iceberg, through its visual nature, onstreet homelessness attracts the greatest attention and, subsequently, the greatest investment. However, this narrow focus on street homelessness may lead to ignoring the broader definitions of homelessness, which can include those without a permanent address or other insecure sleeping arrangements.

Only a few locations have high numbers of street

homelessness and those municipalities where homeless is unseen i.e. people living in cars, couch surfing or living in overcrowded conditions might insist they don't have a 'homelessness problem' at all. By failing to recognise these less visual types of homelessness, we risk overlooking those groups in policy and protection, or ignoring them entirely.

A focus on homelessness from multiple perspectives and experiences, with a view towards prevention is something that local government can take some responsibility for and drive. A particular focus on wider council services, not normally associated with homelessness, like maternal and child health and youth services and facilities, like libraries and neighbourhood houses, may present opportunities for early observation and intervention before homelessness hits crisis point.

THE PRESSURES OF PUBLIC SPACE MANAGEMENT

As the level of government responsible for building, managing and maintaining urban spaces and infrastructure, councils can feel the pressure when the use of public space becomes contested.

As people without a home may be forced to live their lives on streets, in parks and other public locations, councils may receive enquiries regarding welfare issues, as well as complaints about safety, access and amenity. This can often push local governments into conflicting territory, managing the needs of multiple stakeholders.

To increase the complexity of this situation, councils also often find themselves managing multiple public use issues, including public congregations, begging, drinking and drug use. Often these activities can be labelled

²² Australian Homeless Monitor: https://www.launchhousing.org.au/australianhomelessnessmonitor_p.93

INTRODUCTION

The government worker experience

‘homelessness’ when that is not the situation of people involved. Situations like this often require response through multiple partners and a number of councils in Australia and overseas are taking action by convening partnership groups that focus on welfare, safety and amenity concerns together.

SILOED APPROACHES AND BUDGETING LIMITATIONS

While opportunities exist for local government to take more action in homelessness response, particularly in early intervention, siloed approaches in planning, organising, budgeting and program delivery can limit outcomes.

In the UK in particular, a number of local government workers noted how yearly funding cycles, issued through the central government, with no guarantee of continuation, limited program development and innovation, and posed a barrier in recruiting quality staff.

It was also mentioned that a council’s own recurring budget cycles created limitations when time and assetpoor staff renewed the same spending year on year and were reluctant to attempt alternate approaches and cut their teeth on new crosscorporate initiatives.

Additionally, yearly budgets allocated according to specific programs and activities e.g. ‘homelessness’, ‘youth programs’, ‘mental health’, ‘alcohol and other drugs’ – can discourage further internal collaboration and create programmatic silos that do not accommodate the crosssector efforts needed in homelessness response.

CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF LOCAL POLITICS AND POLITICAL CYCLES

“You need to understand that homelessness is very political. Unless you understand the politics, you can’t really get anywhere... I don’t think anyone goes into politics specifically wanting to work on homelessness, so we have to help them understand it and the policy change that is needed.” Dominic Williamson, Consultant to Westminster Homelessness Coalition.

The former Mayor of Edmonston, Canada, Don Iveson, who entered politics on a sustainability platform and came to be known for his work – and achievements – in addressing homelessness told me this: “I am a believer that elected officials are time stamped by their first election. Housing affordability was a big issue when I was elected – specifically



“I am a believer that elected officials are time stamped by their first election... Even though my initial focus at City Council was on other issues, the urgency on housing and homelessness strongly informed my leadership.”

DON IVESON, FORMER MAYOR, CITY OF EDMONTON, CANADA

how to respond to encampments... Even though my initial focus at City Council was on other issues, the urgency on housing and homelessness strongly informed my leadership.”

A theme running through several of my interviews was that savvy politicians come to realise pretty early on that they cannot ignore homelessness, and local government responses are often very much driven by local politics.

Unfortunately, political cycles are time limited and homelessness response is often a long game, so managing expectations and outcomes can be a challenge. ☹️



L-R Robyn Bailey and Rahat Aslam
Manchester City Council Street Outreach workers

As part of my investigations, I met up with workers from more than 20 local government and combined authorities in the UK, US and Canada, and on every occasion, I can attest to significant amounts of headnodding as we discussed my personal experience and motivations for undertaking a Churchill Fellowship that investigated local government responses to homelessness.

On every occasion, I left these meetings intrigued that despite our distance, the different systems we worked in and variations in the size and scope of what we were responding to, the challenges we faced as government workers are never too dissimilar.

I must admit that this was both disheartening (how can we all work on this and no one sees an end to it?) and reassuring (I am not the only one).

An important part of understanding the role that

local government can play in homelessness response is in understanding the situation, opportunities and constraints experienced by those working in this level of government.

Being public servants, not everyone could talk on the record, so in this section I will reflect on what I heard across the board, without identifying individuals.

BEING OVERWORKED AND UNDERPAID

Despite prevailing negative stereotypes regarding the work ethic and output of council workers (an unfortunate typecast that I heard echoed internationally, as well), the fact remains that across the board, officers working on homelessness – in councils and the in the services sector – tend to be overworked, underpaid and undervalued.

This testimony from a worker in the UK was →

“We have very good relationships with local authorities and civil servants... We all understand that the government is going to want to bash the mayor, the mayor will want to bash the government and local authorities will bash back. What we all want is that we don’t want people homeless on the street. And a lot of my job is making sure we are all rowing in the same direction... Appreciating that every now and again someone is going to use rough sleeping as a way of blaming government.”

LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKER, UK.

reflected by many others I heard, and highlighting the financial hardships faced by many front end workers

“I worked for private sector mental health and in a hostel before moving to council. It was the money that brought me into council.

It’s very hard working to help people when you are being paid less than they get on benefits. It sounds horrible but you need to get properly paid. Before, it was a struggle to pay my rent, bills and food. Now I can do that. I can drive my car and, if I’m careful, I don’t need to worry.

These jobs just need to pay more.”
It was also clear that many workers at all levels carry huge workloads and rarely have the time to reflect on what they are doing, how to improve or innovate.

“It’s the same projects, year after year. No one innovates. The easiest thing to do is the same thing.”

“People are really busy responding and don’t have the time to communicate what they are doing. The system is under resourced, and people are stressed.”

Another lost opportunity I heard from local government colleagues is that many are so busy, they do not get the chance to properly share their work to let community, colleagues and partners know what they do, and what they are capable of.

The situation creates an ongoing loop that does no favours for the weary worker. There is so much going on at once and so many requests to attend to, that you have no time to stop, reflect and improve, no time to tell others what you do, no time to make important connections and, importantly, no time to change others’ perceptions of what you actually do and your achievements.

BALANCING MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES

“Working for city government can be difficult. It’s a really challenging and emotionally charged topic to discuss. There are the issues of balancing the needs and rights of the unhoused and the needs and rights of people who live around there.

It’s a struggle. You can sometimes feel powerless as a city. You want to do more but our mandate is parks, roads [and] garbage collection. We have to find creative ways to respond.”

While we all work for one organisation, council officers work on very different projects for very different parts of the community, and what is deemed success for one part of a council might be failure for another.

In the homelessness space that means workers often must be able to see situations from many sides and be expert negotiators and collaborators to get others working in line with what they want to achieve.

And, because it is so visible, rough sleeping can become fractious and political, with many of the people I spoke to noting that it wasn’t unusual to spend many hours of their working day responding to questions and complaints from members of the community, businesses, and their local politicians.

Often these require quick responses, taking staff away from their other, ongoing responsibilities.

“You’ve got so many competing interests business, residents, politicians and those three take precedence over the people who are homeless.”

The role of elected members – especially mayors – in sharing information and influencing perceptions of homelessness is vast and there are plenty of examples of mayors leading and driving community sentiment in many different ways.

DELIVERING EDUCATION AND MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

It might not be part of the standard job description for a council homelessness worker, but two of the

most mentioned skills I came across in interviews about the nature of the job were the ability to communicate and to teach.

“People say ‘they are homeless and there is nothing we can do’. Much of my job is battling language and preconceptions.”

The location of local government embedded in a community opens many opportunities for workers to tell their stories about rates of homelessness, how homelessness manifests locally and what they are doing to make a difference. Council workers are often placed in the position where they need to bust preconceptions or myths about homelessness and humanise the situation to build empathy.

“I say, look, I can’t tell you what to think...But come see what we do. Come hear what we have to say. And come to your own conclusion.”

PLAYING THE POLITICAL GAME

“With elected members, it has been a bit of a struggle. I don’t believe they fully understand the issues. You can tell they appreciate what you are doing but they don’t appreciate the impact of homelessness, the cost, the complexity.”

There is no local government without politics and a number of council workers reflected on their role in supporting their elected members to understand the issues and the often conflicting demands made of them in responding to homelessness locally. Some reported this element of the role could constitute an (almost) full-time job.

“We have spent years helping elected members understand the issue – two or three briefings a year to explain policy. Members can question us, ask for information anytime.”

Another regular consideration was understanding that politics is beholden to election cycles and these relatively short periods of time often do not align with the long timeframes generally needed to end homelessness. In a world where easy to digest data, sharp sound bites and quick wins are valued, a long game like homelessness prevention and response is often a hard one to play.

TAKING THE FLACK

“It’s a matter of holding the anxiety of the community. People will attack you personally, professionally.”

“A portion of our community partners are really critical advocates. [This is] not a bad thing. They play a role and are important in a healthy system where we are pulled to do things better, but they are extremely critical of anything the government

does... This work has been really challenging and then you have advocates pointing at you saying, ‘you are a bad person’.”

While this Fellowship confirmed my faith in humanity many times over, it also often arose that working in homelessness in local government can be a thankless job with lots of responsibility, little power, and many people (internally and externally) ready to critique every move that you make.

Many of the amazing people I spoke to acknowledged this and just kept going, convinced that the role they played was important. However, the stress this creates is evident and it is a lesson to all managers to keep watch.

It’s a hard job and the people who work for you feel it and need your support.

GROWING SHARP ELBOWS

I think many of us who have experienced bureaucracy will agree that it can be one of the greatest pain points in government and it was certainly a strong point of discussion across the continents.

At higher levels of management, I heard some interesting reflections about what it takes to succeed as a government worker in this space and it is not always toeing the line, but rather an ability to know when to follow rules and when to break them.

I think tackling bureaucracy is the real crunch in government work it sets some people up for success and sends others running and screaming out of their government office.

Along the way, I was fortunate to meet some amazing leaders who have worked out a good balance. “Sometimes there is a benefit in being impulsive. Strike while the iron is hot. Other times you need to be patient... Peel back the onion and see what the real issues and opportunities are. Learn more and listen more.”

“I have sharp elbows and I am a fighter. I have been doing this for many years. I know what is right.”

“In local government I feel like some people don’t like the folks who are troublemakers, pushing for change and against the status quo.

But I am not here to manage a problem. I am not going to create systems and track things and be busy unless it is leading to change.

I want to see a solution to homelessness, and to disrupt the status quo.

I hire specialists and I try and make myself part of every conversation that will change things.

I talk and listen and then commit resources to it.”

The challenges of a local government worker



Robert White was the head commissioner for Supported Housing and Rough Sleeping Services, leading the response through the design, development and implementation of policy and strategy at the City of Westminster in central London.

Upon leaving that role, he published an article in the [Guardian](#) reflecting on the challenges city governments, like Westminster, face in responding to homelessness. In the article, he comments on the political pressures government workers feel in this high-profile portfolio, the difficulties faced in responding to community concerns and demands, and the many tried-and-failed attempts to set the 'problem' right.

He concludes: "If we can work together to identify broken power dynamics and walk alongside people to understand what they can do, not what they can't do, then there is hope. We need to make decisions with people, led by them, not centred on them. We need to treat them as assets, not burdens, and give people back control of their own lives."

I had the opportunity to meet Robert in his former Westminster location.

I worked so far away in Melbourne but was struck by the similarities in our experience, the shared challenges - and frustrations - I felt when working in capital city government.

Below are some of Robert's reflections on the role local government can play and the challenges faced by officers in homelessness response positions.

RELATIONSHIPS, RESPONSE AND INNOVATION

"The role of the local government can become to manage the problem but not necessarily change things. Much of the innovation taking place in the homelessness space is focused on system tweaking - not changing the way we work with people.

"Most local authority funding is very transactional. Services do what they are told, and the big homelessness organisations get a lot of money to do their work.

"The people employed to respond never get a chance to sit and think about how it can be different. They are just constantly working on the problems in front of them."



Robert White

"It suited us because they did what we asked and if something went wrong, they took the hit. It made life easy, we never changed.

"A paradigm shift from 'command and control' to doing what the people ask is a huge change but until we move into a strengths-based culture we won't have a different outcome. We will always have poor people being poor and an undercurrent of homelessness."

REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF COUNCIL OFFICER

"Places like central London see a huge amount of focus on homelessness. Homelessness is a hot topic with a lot of high-level focus, including from elected



officials and senior management.

"It is all about optics - how things look.

"The people employed to respond never get a chance to sit and think about how it can be different. They are just constantly working on the problems in front of them.

"As a job description, [the role of] homelessness manager looks 'good': you put things in place and help people end homelessness. But what you find is that you are no longer responsible to the homeless person... You are much more beholden to business and the wealthy residents who have the ear of the council and police.

Street sleeping in Westminster

"The concept of joint enforcement [services working with council and police] is wrought. You offer something to the people on the streets first and if they don't take it, you kick them out."

You dress it up as trying to do your best.

SOME IDEAS FOR CHANGE

"Council staff working on homelessness are stretched to the limit. They cannot get all the work done and do not have the time to think about improving flawed systems.

"Fundamentally, you need two teams: A team that does the 'fire fighting' [solves the day-to-day problems] and another that looks at what you want to achieve and at longer-term outcomes.

"You have to move to a locality-based mindset and decision making. For example:

Look at genuine, individual viewpoints.

When we co-produce a response for the community, with the community, start with the question, 'what does a good life look like to you?' If you are genuinely led by the person who you want to help, that person is in control.

Look at how you leverage community money and work with health and other services - not separately. Move away from individual budgets and take a whole community approach."

Guidelines for local government

Through my Fellowship, I had the opportunity to ask colleagues working in the UK, US and Canada what they thought local government could do to respond to the social, environmental, economic and political implications of homelessness in their local area. Through this enquiry, I collected ideas, tips, stories and resources about how local government can drive and steer response efforts.

This section brings together what I learned into a set of guidelines. It groups potential local government responses under four themes:

1) knowing your homelessness situation; 2) leading the narrative and driving collaboration; 3) organising your approach and your workforce, 4) acting wherever you can. Specific actions that a council may implement are then listed under each of these themes.

While government structures, laws and the scale of homelessness differed between countries, I found it was possible to look beyond these differences and capture the actions and ideas that remain relevant and can be replicated elsewhere. Similarly, the case studies provide practical examples, and hopefully a positive reminder, that opportunities to act and make a difference at the local government level do exist.

I expect that local government colleagues using these guidelines might scan through and find the responses relevant to their own circumstances and refer back regularly for a few ideas and guidance.

KNOW your local homelessness situation

“If you have data, then you know much more about the situation. You can see where people are from, their health needs and vulnerabilities, and you can also see that if you don’t do anything about it, there will be consequences. When you have information, you shift from thinking about whether you should do something to actually doing it.” David Ireland, CEO World Habitat.

As the closest level of government to the community, councils are in a good position to make ground level observations and gather data about the local homelessness situation and experiences.

Local authorities often hold strong skillsets in

community engagement and co-design methodologies. These approaches can be used to draw out community sentiments, helping councils to better understand the broad needs, concerns and expectations within the local community. An agreed definition of homelessness among partners will also help councils fully understand the local situation and know what everyone is working towards.

Know your homelessness situation

COLLECT
LOCAL
DATA

LISTEN
TO YOUR
COMMUNITY

ESTABLISH
A SHARED
DEFINITION



Above: Figure 1 – the four broad themes – what local government can do to end homelessness

Collect local data

Collect data in your area and use that to make decisions about what to do next. Know how you will manage privacy concerns and work with your partners to find an agreed way of working.

I heard from a number of people that knowing your homelessness situation is an important first step for any council wishing to take action on homelessness. Point-in-time counts and by-name lists are two regularly used methods to capture this data.

- Point-in-time counts capture numbers of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night. Teams will walk street by street in a specified location and may conduct simple interviews or record observations. While these counts have been criticised for lack of accuracy and depth of information, they do provide a number that can be used as an advocacy tool and can be useful to track changes over time.

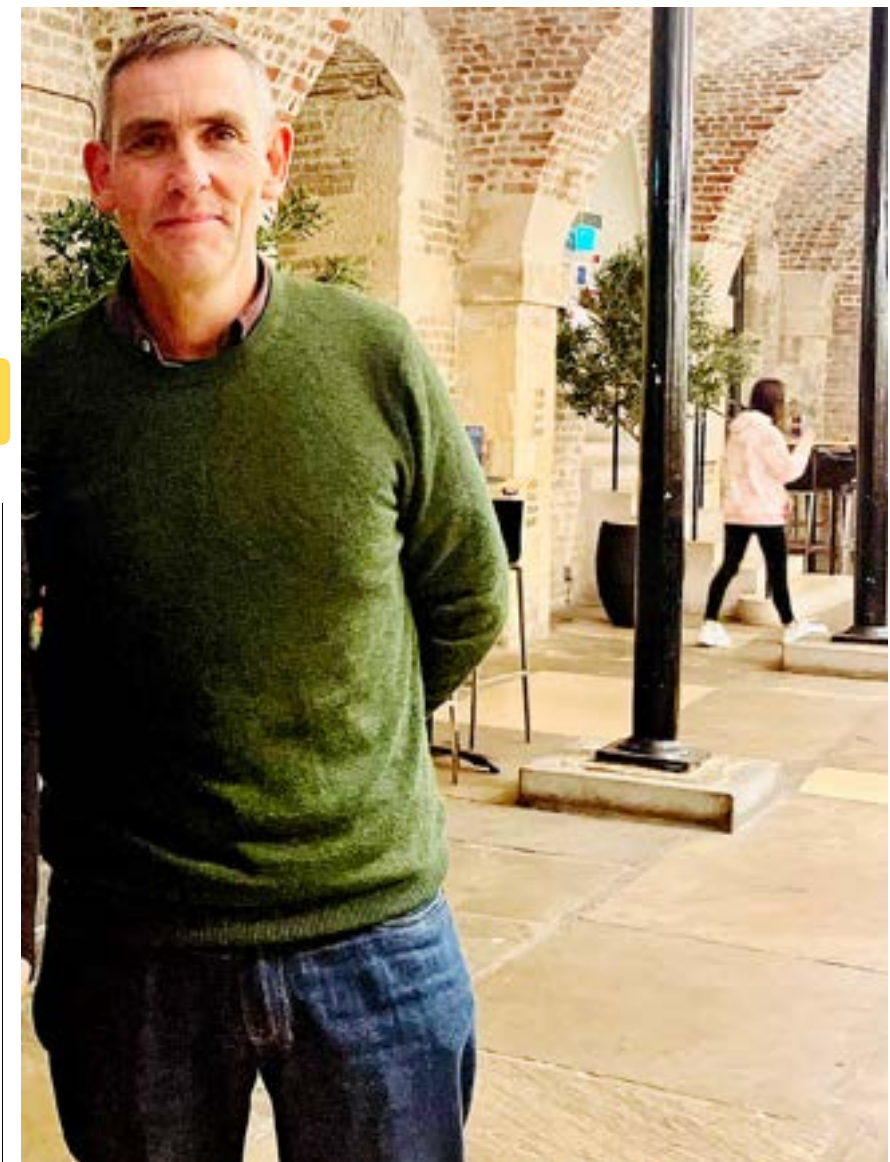
- By-name lists provide more detailed insight into the situation of each person experiencing homelessness in a local area. These lists can form the basis of service coordination meetings.

It should be noted that data justice is an important consideration, specifically that gathering and analysing data might only be justified if people’s lives are improved in ways that would not have happened in the absence of that data. Councils need to be aware and pay attention to this to ensure that the data and evidence gathered on local homelessness is used in a way that results in meaningful impact.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- National governments in the UK and US require local areas to conduct regular point-in-time counts.
- The [US Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) (HUD) requires all communities receiving federal funds to undertake point-in-time counts. These are required yearly for people who are sheltered and every two years for persons unsheltered. HUD provides many support resources online.

- [Local authorities](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland undertake yearly point-in-time counts which are either physical counts of individuals seen sleeping on the street or estimates by local agencies. Scotland collects data when a person applies for homelessness assistance.



Dominic Williamson, Westminster Homelessness Coalition

“I have always defended using (street count) figures because they give you one simple political metric. Everyone can see whether it’s going up or down. Then we can keep the political pressure going.”

**DOMINIC WILLIAMSON,
CONSULTANT TO
WESTMINSTER
HOMELESSNESS
COALITION (UK)**

- [Article](#): Yes, there is a better way to measure homelessness than the annual point-in-time count
- The use of by-name data is an important element in the Built for Zero methodology, developed by the US organisation [Community Solutions](#) and adapted around the world, including in [Australia](#).
- [Photo essay](#): Montreal’s homelessness count:

REFLECTION

Point-in-time counts have been criticised for their lack of accuracy and depth of information. Homelessness is known to be a dynamic situation, experienced in many ways, which cannot be measured through a static number. On the flip side, the number itself has been seen as a useful tool to track progress in addressing homelessness – particularly rough sleeping – across multiple years. This number can also be a useful tool in advocacy, to inform communities and politicians, and hold politicians to account.

Privacy is an ongoing consideration when collecting personal information. Legal advice is important but beware that advice could be protecting the corporate entity rather than focusing on how to best serve someone experiencing homeless. Decisions regarding privacy need to be weighed against an individual’s situation and the level of risk a person faces. ☹

Listen to your community

2



Maggie Brujnes,
Homelessness Network
Scotland

Take time to listen and learn from your community. Know what they are doing and build your approach with them.

Councils are well positioned to tap into and take on board the needs, concerns and opportunities raised by the local community, to help build a full picture and understanding of the local landscape regarding homelessness.

A number of locations that I visited demonstrated the advantages of listening and working with community members in forming policy positions and developing response actions.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- The City of Manchester (UK) understands that while the council holds [legislated responsibility](#) for homelessness in England, they can't respond alone. Much of the strategic decision-making regarding

homelessness in Manchester is informed by and made through the [Manchester Homeless Partnership](#) – a network of individuals with lived experience, organisations in the charity and voluntary sector, government and businesses.

- [Legislative Theatre](#) has been used as tool to engage multiple stakeholders, learn about their experiences and collectively build local government policy responses to homelessness in the UK.

REFLECTION

Listening to your community might be scary, you might hear things that you don't want to hear, but it is something, if approached genuinely, that will build knowledge and trust, and might raise some ideas that weren't thought of before. This is the basis for democracy, after all. All of this is vital in helping a council determine its position and role, and can lead to successful responses where every partner feels involved. 🗣️

“At regular meetings, councils can listen to their partners rather than responding to 20 or 30 different enquiries. Take the complaints and work out how to fix things. This creates a much more productive structure.”

MAGGIE BRUNJES, CEO
HOMELESS NETWORK
SCOTLAND

Establish a shared definition of homelessness

3



Erin Healy and KO
Campbell, Community
Solutions

Work with your partners and agree on how you jointly define homelessness. This will help align your work.

A shared definition of homelessness, clear goals and expected outcomes will keep homelessness efforts within councils and with partners aligned. Importantly, these can also help in holding decision makers accountable.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- The [Centre for Homelessness Impact](#) in the UK has done significant work to define and measure homelessness, focusing on prevention and ensuring occurrences of homelessness are rare, brief and non-recurring.
- In the UK, a new homelessness strategy published in 2022, [Ending Rough Sleeping for Good](#), puts forward a definition of what ending rough sleeping can mean in practice, providing local authorities and partners with a united approach. According to this strategy, the UK Government considers rough sleeping will have ended when every local area ensures rough sleeping is 'prevented wherever possible and, where it cannot be prevented, it is a

“The first thing we try to get teams to do is to commit to our definitions of homelessness...

Definitions are important. They are the foundation for getting people to be on a team together. Something that they are all jointly committed to doing.”

ERIN HEALY, COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

rare, brief and non-recurring experience'

- On the global stage, the [UN General Assembly](#) passed its first ever resolution on homelessness but opted for a description rather than a definition of homelessness.

REFLECTION

Australia does not have a national definition of homelessness, however, there is an opportunity for this to be included in an upcoming national strategy. In the meantime, it can be helpful for local councils to adopt an agreed definition as a way of aligning efforts internally and with external partners. Homelessness Australia lists a selection of definitions: <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/about-homelessness/> 🗣️

CASE STUDY

Legislative Theatre



In the UK I came across Legislative Theatre (which originates in Brazil) as a tool for homelessness strategy building. It was first adopted by the [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) (GMCA) – who won an [Institute of Participative Democracy](#) award for their efforts – and, more recently, by Haringey Council.

The approach brings together groups of stakeholders – people with a lived experience of homelessness, council workers, the service sector and community – to create and perform plays based on their experiences, and workshop solutions to the problems and barriers they face. Through performance, the stakeholder groups engage those with decision-making authority to develop policy proposals. In the case of the GMCA this led to the creation of a homelessness prevention policy.

In Haringey, a core team made up of council staff and people with lived experiences of homelessness and rough sleeping worked together to create an original play based on their real experiences. The [performance and Legislative Theatre sessions](#) were used as a starting point for co-creating Haringey’s new Rough Sleeping Strategy. This project was a collaboration between [Haringey Council](#), [Arts & Homelessness International](#) and [Katy Rubin](#).

In [Manchester](#), five facilitators with lived experience of homelessness worked with the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network, the GMCA and Katy Rubin to lead three public legislative theatre processes focusing on complex needs, funding and structural racism in homelessness services. This fed into Greater Manchester’s first five-year Homelessness Prevention Strategy.

What I found most interesting about the legislative theatre approach is how it removes the separation and anonymity that can exist in government policy making. It provides problem solving techniques through performance and improves accountability by bringing decision makers face-to-face with community. Policy makers are also able to watch and learn how people might interact with the system and what pain points they experience. They delve into issues and roadblocks together, finding ways to address these and, importantly, identifying solutions together, making commitments to accept, reject and/or adjust proposals. A process that is normally ‘behinds the scenes’ takes centre stage.

The process requires a level of commitment that may be challenging to some in government. As Molly Bishop, who oversaw the GMCA process, noted: “It was daring and challenging but overall, an amazing tool and I would recommend any council to explore using it if they are committed to its principles and have the time and senior investment in following it through”.

Maddie Watkins, who has been driving Haringey Council’s rough sleeping strategy, said: “I couldn’t recommend it enough. A strategy shouldn’t start with a tokenistic approach and consultation. This was coproduced from the word go and I haven’t written anything [in the strategy] that the group hasn’t agreed with.”

“I couldn’t recommend it enough. A strategy shouldn’t start with a tokenistic approach and consultation. This was coproduced from the word go and I haven’t written anything in that the group hasn’t agreed with.”

MADDIE WATKINS, HARINGEY COUNCIL



Legislative Theatre in Haringey.



PHOTO BY WILLIAMZ OVORPE

LINKS Manchester

INDEPTH ARTICLE



<https://themetear.org/2022/03/12/legislative-theatre/Evaluation-of-the-Manchester-project>

EVALUATION OF THE MANCHESTER PROJECT



Several links on the Manchester approach are available here:

- <https://streetsupport.net/greater-manchester/legislative-theatre/>
- [Introducing GM Legislative Theatre](#)
- [GMHAN Legislative Theatre - Funding and Commissioning](#)
- [Policy proposals from the Legislative Theatre Funding & Commissioning event](#)
- [Greater Manchester Legislative Theatre Update](#)

SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE

CASE STUDY

Making homelessness everyone’s business in Manchester



The City of Manchester’s approach to homelessness response is making sure that it is everyone’s business. While local authorities in the UK hold a degree of [legislated responsibility](#) to respond to homelessness, Manchester’s central city council has met its commitments by forming strong and deep connections with their local community. They have listened, learned from and invited local partners to work with them. Much of the strategic decision making regarding homelessness in Manchester is made through the [Manchester Homelessness Partnership](#) – a network of businesses, government, organisations in the charity and volunteer sector, and individuals with lived experience.

The group works together towards the aims and values of the [Manchester Homelessness Charter](#), with a [partnership board](#) led by the Bishop of Manchester and senior officials across the city. The board allows the council to bridge gaps in its homelessness response that may arise through different parts of the council, such as housing, neighbourhood and adult health and wellbeing, focusing on separate elements of homelessness response. The board connects the council to the community, with representation including:

- Seven people who have lived experience of homelessness;
- Two elected representatives from the voluntary sector;
- Representatives from public sector services including the city council, policing, health, and fire & rescue, and
- Businesses, and both the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University.

While the board takes a strategic view, a number of [Action Groups](#) tackle key challenges relating to local experience, and finding solutions that are fed back to the charter group.

Action group membership is open to any member of the community. It covers: preventing homelessness, provision of evening indoor services, employment opportunities, improving unsupported



Manchester street art



temporary accommodation, mental health, creating opportunities for people with experience of homelessness to engage in arts, migration and destitution, emergency accommodation, young people, alternative ways to give money and reduce street begging.

The strong connection to community allows for nuanced responses and co-ownership of homelessness response, including [Manchester’s Homelessness Strategy](#), which was developed with the partnership.

GUIDELINES

LEAD the narrative and drive collaboration

Local government authorities are well-placed collaborators, connected with many partners in local communities and holding a level of trust that many other levels of government may find hard to attain.

In the homelessness space, internationally and in Australia, many councils are running multi-stakeholder programs, like service coordination, and providing the backbone for other network responses. Importantly, many are engaging people with lived experience to

“It all comes down to relationships. That’s the foundation of how we work. Our greatest asset is the relationships that people have and it’s the golden thread that ties things together.”

MOLLY BISHOP, GREATER MANCHESTER COMBINED AUTHORITY



Molly Bishop, Greater Manchester Combined Authority

advise, improve and participate in service delivery. While local government is in a strong position to act as a connector, challenges do arise. These include determining the role that the local authority will play and how it might bring into partnership diverse players from government, the community, service organisations, businesses and, importantly, people with a lived experience of homelessness. With close connections into a community, councils are also in a good position to educate and drive the local narrative regarding homelessness.



Simon Community Scotland, Homelessness Hub in Glasgow

Nurture community alliances



As a council, carefully consider your role in local collaborations – how much or how little will you contribute? If the opportunity arises you might consider stepping back and letting the community lead.

Councils are establishing networks of specialist homelessness services that work in local communities and taking the lead in managing multi-stakeholder responses. A partnership approach across community aligns needs and expectations and can build greater levels of trust between local groups. These local partnerships might not only include the established homelessness response agencies, but also engage faith and business communities, as well as community members and leaders.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

• Wigan, a community in greater Manchester, demonstrated how council-led community alliances embedded in agreed values can create a strong base in addressing homelessness. Through a deliberate program to identify community strengths and establish clear roles and responsibilities between the council and all partners, the [Wigan Deal](#) was able to create trusting partnerships that improved outcomes across the community.

• Formal partnerships that define the situation and set principles and values across many stakeholders have also proven to be successful in bringing communities

“Let go. Maybe it isn’t us who needs to act. Maybe someone else can do it better.” DAVID GRAY, WIGAN COUNCIL

together to address homelessness. This can be seen in initiatives like [Leicester’s homelessness charter](#), which brings more than 30 collaborators together to work on a shared initiative. See also [Manchester’s Homeless Partnership](#).



Building in Wigan

REFLECTION

An investment into community collaboration reaps benefits. It builds trust and can capture – and put to good use – the will and energy of a community. A clear understanding of the situation and desired outcomes, as well as agreed principles and values, will help guide this work. ☺

Lead the narrative and drive collaboration

NURTURE COMMUNITY ALLIANCES

EMBRACE LIVED EXPERIENCE

INVOLVE ALL PARTS OF GOVERNMENT

ADDRESS WELFARE, SAFETY & AMENITY

COMMUNICATE AND EDUCATE

5 Embrace lived experiences



Jean Baldamenti,
DC Public Library

Look to people with a lived experience of homelessness to partner in and inform your work. They will bring a perspective and an ability to connect that you may not be able to tap into in other ways. Ensure safe environments and explore ways to provide ongoing support and long-term employment opportunities.

Lived experience perspectives are often sought to inform the development, design, delivery and evaluation of homelessness response initiatives. This approach acknowledges the value of life experience and its potential to provide a greater understanding of systems usage and the barriers faced by those currently experiencing homelessness. This enhanced perspective may help improve responses and outcomes.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Library social work programs in the US are providing opportunities to connect with people experiencing homelessness and/or other complex issues who might access libraries as safe and welcoming spaces. Peer worker programs, like that at the [San Francisco Public library](#), open-up many opportunities for customers to connect with lived experience workers who are trusted, non-threatening and can relate to a person's situation.

- As part of the [Peer Navigator Program](#) at Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Free Library, peer workers

"Peer workers have a different kind of relationship with customers... A peer can have an hour conversation with someone, and they have had the same experience, and I think that's the benefit."

JEAN BALDAMENTI, DC
PUBLIC LIBRARY

are trained through the [Maryland Addiction and Behavioral-health Professionals Certification Board](#), a private, non-partisan corporation offering international and state level credentials. Peer support accreditation covers a variety of skills and is offered free to people with lived experience of mental health or substance use, as well as family members. This is an excellent example of how government can build partnerships with training organisations and provide formal qualifications alongside opportunities to build on-the-job skills.

OTHER RESOURCES:

- Washington DC's peer navigator program (video): [DISCOVER: DC Public Library's Peer Navigator Program](#)
- Article (Australia): [Bringing the lived experience of homelessness into city-making](#)

REFLECTION

There are many opportunities and reasons for local government to initiate and build opportunities that engage people with lived experience. Initiatives should acknowledge peer workers as professional and valued contributors, treat them as equal partners (like, for example, paying fees equivalent to other consultants) and offer development opportunities. Formal partnerships with training organisations can provide lived experience workers with qualifications and also demonstrate the value that governments place on this workforce.

Local government should also be able to ensure that all efforts are safe for the people involved and provide genuine experiences that don't cause more trauma or stress. ☺

6 Involve all parts of government



David Eastwood, Greater
London Authority

Consider which government partners will be most important to you in addressing the social, economic, environmental and political aspects of homelessness locally, and bring those people together. A government mandate, or a call to action from your Mayor, Council, or other community leaders may help encourage and ensure participation.

Strong cross-government collaborations – at the federal, state and local levels – are opening opportunities for greater impact of services and cutting red tape.

Alliances between multiple government agencies divide responsibilities according to specialisation and expertise, recognising that homelessness responses are complex and multi-faceted. Councils can also look further than their own boundaries and collaborate with other municipalities on homelessness response, responding to wider community needs and finding some economies of scale that might reduce costs.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

It is important to keep in mind that political systems, and specific laws in place in the UK, US and Canada mean not everything I discussed and observed while overseas is directly applicable in Australia. However, there are examples of good practice and lessons that can be noted and replicated.

- [The Greater London Authority](#) (GLA), under the Mayor of London, works across 32 London boroughs and the City of London. The GLA oversees many cross-city homelessness response programs such as [StreetLink](#), a rough sleeper referral service; [No Second Night Out](#), which provides immediate accommodation for people sleeping rough, and [CHAIN](#) (Combined homelessness and Information network), a multi-agency database of people sleeping rough.

- In the rest of England, [Combined Authorities](#) are set up through national legislation to allow two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. Ten Combined Authorities have been established across the UK.

- [The Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) brings together 10 local councils to work collaboratively on homelessness.

- The US Interagency Council on Homelessness is a federal agency solely focused on preventing and ending homelessness. The Council holds responsibility to create and implement the [Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#).

- Several US cities and counties have established their own interagency councils (or commissions) on homelessness. These are enabled through legislation and bring multiple stakeholders together to enact homelessness plans and address local homelessness issues. See:

- Montgomery County's [Interagency Commission on Homelessness](#)
- Washington DC's [Interagency Council on Homelessness](#)

REFLECTION

Homelessness is not just the responsibility of a government's human services department. Effective responses draw on many partners and, importantly, the input from many government departments. These could include justice, health and community safety, to name a few.

These partners will come with different responsibilities and perspectives – they may provide a medical, mental or drug and alcohol response, ensure street safety and amenity, liaise with businesses, or shoulder responsibility for people exiting institutions. Councils can bring these parties together to look at the full picture and its impacts in the local area and establish unique local responses.

Additionally, because homelessness cuts across municipal boundaries, it makes absolute sense to work with neighbouring councils. Collaboration between councils can allow greater reach and might save money through the ability to establish economies of scale. ☺

"You have to keep good relationships. Be as honest as we can be and share as much info as we can. Maintain open relationships between everyone and trust on the officer level."
DAVID EASTWOOD,
GREATER LONDON
AUTHORITY

Collaborate to address welfare, safety and amenity

“Working with services helps us and opens our eyes a little more. The days of being heavy handed are gone. We are public servants, and we can find ways to work with people. There is so much we can do, and we are open to talk to services to see what help can be provided.”
DAN LANE, COMMUNITY SERVICE OFFICER, GAITHERSBURG POLICE (US)

Establish coordinated partnership responses with agreed goals and well-defined roles and responsibilities. This will keep disparate groups aligned and help distribute actions to those with the expertise and capability to respond.

On-street homelessness may raise concerns within a community – concerns about health and welfare, calls to clean up streets, fears about safety. Councils may be called to do something, often in areas where they hold no control or responsibility. A key to addressing this might be in convening multi-stakeholder initiatives to balance both the needs of people experiencing homelessness and other impacts on the broader community, including safety and amenity concerns.

Relationships with police require particular attention. Often, in the absence of other alternatives, police are called in to respond to street homelessness, but often a policing approach is not the best option. With police as partners in multi-stakeholder responses that focus on welfare as well as local amenity and safety alternatives, law enforcement can become the last, not the first, option.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- San Francisco’s [Healthy Streets Operations Centre](#) (HSOC) is a cross government initiative that coordinates many city agencies and partners to ensure San Francisco streets are safe and clean; meet the shelter and service needs of individuals on the street, and establish a unified city response to homelessness and street behaviour. Vision, goals and outcomes are clearly and regularly updated through publicly available [dashboards](#) that track homelessness numbers and response operations.
- [Cityco](#), a management company representing 400 businesses in Manchester (UK), provides an example of how business can be a key partner and play a constructive role in homelessness response.

- In New York, homelessness service the Bowery Residents Committee (BRC) is contracted by business



Dan Lane, Community Service Officer, Gaithersburg Police (US)

to run street outreach services. This [interview](#) with BRC President Muzzy Rosenblatt and Rob Byrnes from the East Midtown Business Improvement District provides a good insight into the partnership.

REFLECTION

Finding ways to establish and navigate multi-stakeholder responses when a number of stakeholders are not aligned can be difficult and confronting work. It requires constant negotiation and often a high level of experience and emotional intelligence to bridge multiple perspectives. Sometimes council officers can find themselves in the middle as social services, police, residents, businesses and others jostle to meet their separate needs.

Agreed visions, goals and outcomes are important in bringing groups together and will also assist in responding to public and business concerns and complaints. ☺

Communicate and educate for better outcomes

Councils have the connections and the means to change perceptions and attitudes about homelessness. Make the time to use these channels and engage professional assistance if you can – it will make a difference.

Many people might have an opinion about homelessness but considering the complexities of a situation and the individual factors involved, these opinions might be misinformed, based on stereotypes or biases and simple ignorance.

When it comes to approving new social or affordable housing, councils may find themselves at the frontline of community opposition, a situation that always needs to be navigated and negotiated with care.

Councils are in a strong position to use local information and expertise to educate community, businesses, partners and elected members, breaking stereotypes, raising awareness, framing issues and leading the conversation. Councils can also use their local knowledge and data to advocate for change, direct goodwill efforts and ultimately influence how a community responds to homelessness.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Crisis (UK) and the Frameworks Institute have developed a series of discussion papers and training modules to help people reconsider and reframe messaging about homelessness. A collection of documents and videos are available on the [Reframing Homelessness](#) website.

- Newcastle (UK) Council’s homelessness team prioritises communications to educate and inform their community, council and staff about what they do and how they can be involved. Housing and homelessness information on their website is transactional and educational. It includes resources for people [experiencing or at risk of homelessness](#), [what to do if you see someone sleeping rough](#) and [information for professionals and volunteers](#). [Trigger point conversations](#) are sets of fact sheets, providing information to support councillors, multi-agency staff and volunteers to talk to residents about [financial inclusion](#), [housing](#) and employment issues.



Above: Joslyn Carter, New York Department of Homeless Services

Below: Toronto Cares campaign



“We continue to educate that homelessness is not a criminal activity, not a misfortune. It is people who are going through an experience at a point in time.”

JOSLYN CARTER, NEW YORK DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES

- The City of Toronto ran the [Toronto Cares](#) campaign to counter stereotypes about homelessness, including myth-busting fact sheets and posters.
- This video about [San Francisco’s Homelessness Response System](#) is a good example of how organisations can tell a complex story in a simple way.

- Data that helps us understand how a local community, a city, a state or even the whole country perceive homelessness can be extremely useful to inform communication efforts. Crisis UK’s [Public Attitudes towards homelessness](#) survey is a good example of how this information can be collected.

- The words we choose to use when talking about homelessness are also important. According to blogger Bryony Shannon (who spoke at Scotland’s Home For 10 Conference), we “can distance and exclude people but, if we use words differently, can welcome and include people.” <https://rewritingsocialcare.blog/author/bryonyshannon/>

REFLECTION

I heard strong agreement across many locations that local government has a role to play in building knowledge of a local homelessness situation, challenging stereotypes and correcting misinformation.

However, we are often so busy doing the work, we have little time to stop and tell others what we are doing. Councils have the connections and means to tell communities about the work that they and partners are doing to address homelessness locally. ☺

CASE STUDY

Homelessness charter brings Leicester's community together



Leicester's homelessness charter is an example of community coming together, agreeing on a joint definition of homelessness, as well as agreeing on aims, principles and values.

The charter was initiated through the Diocese of Leicester and launched at the Cathedral in 2018. Initial signatories covered diverse interests, and included the City Mayor, the Bishop of Leicester and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Since its inception, the charter has seen a wide group of more than 30 partners and over 150 signatories from all parts of the community – including those who work in the homelessness response space, as well as other parts of the community that see the impact of street sleeping as well as other forms of homelessness.

When I met with the Charter's coordinator, Rebecca Pawley, she noted how a definition, along with stated aims and values can be a strong binding factor that facilitates coordination among many different partners.

She also noted that the partnership is a good way for council and the community to connect in with each other and make communication two-way, rather than the council just telling the community what it is doing.

"Our meetings help everyone see that the council don't and shouldn't be doing everything."

"Within the Charter, we have a range of partners from the voluntary/not for profit sector who provide a variety of services for people experiencing homelessness and are an essential part of the solution in Leicester. We also work closely with the local business sector to provide our [Give Leicester](#) contactless giving points, which direct public donations directly to local homelessness initiatives.

"It's good to have the joint commitment", she said. "Without that joint place I don't know where people would direct that energy. There is great value in the Charter being independent of the other statutory and charitable organisations working within homelessness.

More information, including the charter and a pledge page is available on the charter's website.

TOGETHER LEICESTER
<https://togetherleicester.org.uk/>



Leicester's Homelessness Charter

Background

What do we mean by homelessness?

People can be homeless if they have nowhere to stay and are sleeping on the streets; they can also be considered homeless (also known as the hidden homeless) even if they have a roof over their head.

This means that homelessness can also include people who are:

- Sofa surfing (temporarily staying with friends or family)
- Staying in a hostel, night shelter or bed & breakfast accommodation
- Squatting
- Homeless because of violence or abuse in their home
- Living in poor conditions which affect their health
- Living apart from their family because they don't have a place to live together.

What is the scale of the issue in Leicester?

Like the national picture, Leicester has seen increasing numbers of people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness can affect anyone and people can become homeless for lots of different reasons. There are social causes of homelessness, such as a lack of affordable housing, poverty, 'no recourse to public funds', unemployment and certain life events that cause individuals to become homeless.

People can also become homeless when they leave prison, care, the armed forces or accommodation for asylum seekers, and have no home to go to. Many homeless women will have escaped violent relationships and some people become homeless simply because they can no longer afford the rent.

Life events like a relationship breaking down, losing a job, mental or physical health problems, or substance misuse can be the trigger. Being homeless can in turn make many of these problems even harder to resolve.

Aims of a homelessness charter for Leicester

- Provide a multi-sector leadership / a shared vision
- Communicate a clear vision to the wider public
- Help to harness and enable partnership working
- Gain a greater understanding of the purposes, expertise and capabilities of those involved
- Improve communication between charter supporters
- Develop an inclusive approach including involving people who are or who have been homeless
- Provide a framework for learning, improvement and sharing experience between charter supporters and to enable and monitor change
- Enable charter supporters to support and advise one another
- Develop trusted standards for homelessness services
- Raise awareness of services providing support and work to prevent homelessness locally
- Provide advice and sign-posting to charter supporters and the public
- Provide a focus for co-ordination
- Identify areas for action and working together to tackle these challenges

Shared principles and values

As individuals or groups actively working to tackle homelessness, or as individuals or businesses supporting work to tackle homelessness, we share values about how people should be treated and how we should treat each other and hold principles of what we want to achieve when we work together. Involving people who have experience of being homeless will be essential to ensure Leicester's homelessness charter delivers positive action to tackle homelessness.

Principles of the charter

Homelessness affects individuals, families and friends and the wider community. Partnership working can be challenging at times but our focus will be making sure people are at the heart of what we do. This includes our staff and volunteers, people who are homeless and all the people that live and work in the city.

On our own we will rarely, if ever, be able to meet all the needs of individuals who are homeless. It is therefore important to develop effective communication between those in the city working with people who are homeless; those affected by homelessness and those supporting work to tackle homelessness. More can be achieved by working effectively together; reducing duplication and ensuring we have a shared vision about working to prevent homelessness.

"It's good to have the joint commitment. Without that joint place I don't know where people would direct that energy."

REBECCA PAWLEY, TOGETHER LEICESTER

During 2017 Leicester City Council undertook a comprehensive review of homelessness in Leicester (this is done at least every five years).

For the years 2016/17 we found that:

- 1,412 families were provided with support to help them maintain their current home or find alternative accommodation
- 2,327 single people were provided with support to help them maintain their current home or find alternative accommodation
- Leicester's Rough Sleeping Outreach team identified 198 individuals rough sleeping

This does not include the hidden homeless, or those sleeping rough in concealed locations and who do not seek help from the local authority. Locally it is thought that women are more likely to be hidden homeless whereas there are more homeless men in temporary accommodation.

More information about homelessness in Leicester and local homelessness services can be found in Leicester's Homelessness Review, for a copy please email housing-transformation-team@leicester.gov.uk

Where did the idea for a charter come from?

Leicester has many organisations and individuals providing support to people who are homeless in Leicester, and there are many more individuals, organisations and businesses that want to help. The question was, how do we harness this support and work effectively together to prevent homelessness?

There were suggestions that we look at adopting a similar approach to the Manchester Homelessness Partnership organised by Street Support Network. They have a charter whereby individuals, organisations, businesses can pledge their support in different ways – from a commitment to support the charter to volunteering, donating money, joining an action group to seeking a 'partnership charter-mark' for services provided.

However, Leicester is not Manchester and we want a proposal that is right for us. This sets out what we think a charter could achieve locally and what our principles and values could be.

The charter's partnership working will involve people who are homeless and people who have experienced homelessness as an integral part of what we do. It is vitally important that these views are reflected and services reflect these needs and aspirations.

Groups and individuals providing services for homeless people or those supporting work to tackle homelessness will have different ways of working, responsibilities, resources and ideas. Likewise, people who are homeless are all different; they have unique needs, expectations and hopes. As organisations sign up to the charter, we acknowledge and welcome our differences and recognise that at times we will view things differently and not agree. We will remain focused on our shared vision of tackling homelessness in Leicester together.

Charter values

Stronger together

Working collectively will achieve the best results. There will be active encouragement of each other to make things happen.

Ambition

There is ambition to succeed. Everyone has their part to play in ending homelessness.

Participation

Everyone has the right to have their voice heard and to participate in decisions that affect them.

Dignity and Respect

People will be treated with dignity and respect.

Inclusion

Differences will be valued and there will be a willingness to listen to new ideas and share views.

Honesty

Everyone is open to receiving, and providing, feedback that is honest and constructive.

What now?

The charter is a call to action; to bring people together to work with one another to prevent homelessness.

Citizens of Leicester, charities, Leicester City Council, healthcare and other public services, faith groups, businesses, institutions and other organisations are asked to adopt the principles and values of this charter, pledge their support and work together with others to tackle key challenges and to prevent homelessness in the city.

For more information and to get involved please contact Homelessness.Charter@LecCoFf.org

CASE STUDY

A combined council response to homelessness in Greater Manchester



Greater Manchester records some of the highest rates of homelessness in the UK. It is also seeing some real movement in addressing that issue.

What is obvious in Manchester is that deliberate cross-council relationships can see results.

Greater Manchester has long experience working together. That joint commitment was evident on the stops I made to Manchester, Rochdale, Salford and Wigan Councils, four of the ten that make up the [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#) (GMCA).

Molly Bishop, who is GMCA's Strategic Lead for Homelessness and Rough Sleeping, told me about the group's long experience in working together, bringing 10 local authorities together with a regional elected Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham.

"It all comes down to relationships," Molly said. "That's the foundation of how we work in Manchester."

"Our greatest asset is the relationships that people have and it's the golden thread that ties things together."

In the homelessness space, GMCA convenes and

facilitates work in four areas:

- Ending rough sleeping;
- Driving affordable housing for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness;
- Preventing homelessness, and
- Driving health inclusion.

The GMCA's theory of change looks to integrate work at a neighbourhood level in each local government area, while utilising collective case-making for joint policy, stronger lobbying and better income maximisation.

From my quick visits, the emphasis on local area identity was a particular standout in Greater Manchester, especially in places like Wigan, where a strong focus on working for the local community, rather than an individual service, helped break silos and improve results in homelessness response.

The [Greater Manchester Model White Paper](#) on unified services outlines six key features that drive this work. Knowing that successful partnerships take work, I found these really useful in thinking about what factors might need to be in place to enable success.



L-R Rochdale (Stephen Broughton and Salford (Rachel Connelly) are two of 10 councils that make up Greater Manchester

Six Key Features of the Greater Manchester Model

Geographic alignment: The neighbourhood level is the building block for local care organisations and the foundational unit for delivery, recognised across public service organisations.

Leadership and accountability: An emphasis on leading for the people and the place as opposed to purely on an organisational or functional basis.

One workforce: There is a look and feel of one public service workforce functioning together, unrestricted by role titles or organisational boundaries working for the place and people.

Shared financial resource: There are means in place to pool transformation and reform funds for collective benefit, and there is also a single commissioning function which pools budgets.

Programs, policy and delivery: All strategic plans and change programmes work towards a common goal of integrated public service delivery, with multiple integrated delivery models coming together as a single neighbourhood delivery model.

Tackling barriers and delivering devolution: Each locality has a formal mechanism to identify, act on and escalate issues that impact on delivering the most effective services for people, or act as a barrier to wider and deeper integration.

LINKS Greater Manchester

PREVENTION STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR GREATER MANCHESTER (2021)



<https://www.gmhan.net/news-and-events/prevention-strategy-and-action-plan-for-greater-manchester-shared/>

COMBINED AUTHORITIES



<https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/devolution-online-hub/devolution-explained/combined-authorities>

SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE

CASE STUDY

Health and Safety Associates bring lived experience into San Francisco's Public Library



San Francisco's main library branch sits right at the intersection of the Civic and Tenderloin districts in San Francisco, an area that's well known for poverty and street homelessness. Leah Esguerra started up the library social work program 14 years ago. One of her first tasks after establishing the program was to hire lived experience workers.

The Health and Safety Associates (known as HASAs) started off as interns and have now become permanent employees of the library. Leah explains that they work three hours a day, five days a week to allow them the opportunity to manage their own lives. "Even before I knew the word trauma informed, I was working in that model," she comments. Leah takes care to support the team - I can see how close they are as we sit around the table and later take a walk through the library. "I meet each HASA at the start and at the end of their shift, for 15 minutes, Leah says. "People in peer outreach really need that to be successful." "Their work with people can trigger past experiences and I want to be there at the end of the day. We talk about things and there is the reminder that we won't take things home with us". I met Leah and three members of the team - Jen, Sid and Ida. They kindly shared a little about their lives and their work at the library. With their permission, I tell their stories.

"Their work with people can trigger past experiences and I want to be there at the end of the day. We talk about things and there is the reminder that we won't take things home with us".

Below: Leah Esguerra (Library social worker)

Bottom: Leah Esguerra, Ida, Sid, Jen (health and safety associates)



JEN

While at one time she had a good career in IT and the airline industry, long term trauma turned to addictions and Jen hadn't held a job for about 8 years. To get her feet wet again her vocational manager recommended the library's Health and Safety Associates program. This is Jen's story in her words. Right away it was wonderful. I was immediately immersed with Leah, who was very qualified and compassionate. Because it is a lived experience role, it's a lot to take in. It's important having the supervisor, someone who can keep you grounded. Keep the guard rails on. Leah gave us so many trainings. I gained insight. I had never learned about boundaries and self-care. In this job we walk all of the six floors of the library. We look for anyone who might be in distress or in need. The first thing I noticed was that in this job you are able to sit with someone and talk to them. One person I was talking to was just so tired. We spoke and I thanked him for being so brave. He said "no one has ever told me I am strong or brave". I told him "I experienced this too. We all have issues". In the past, I thought it was just me being toxic or dysfunctional. This job helped me realise I had something to offer and this gave me a lot of hope. Society has a lot of labels. I had a lot of chaos in my own head. I thought I'd never get another job. That someone would hire me. Being able to help someone really did a lot for me.



IDA

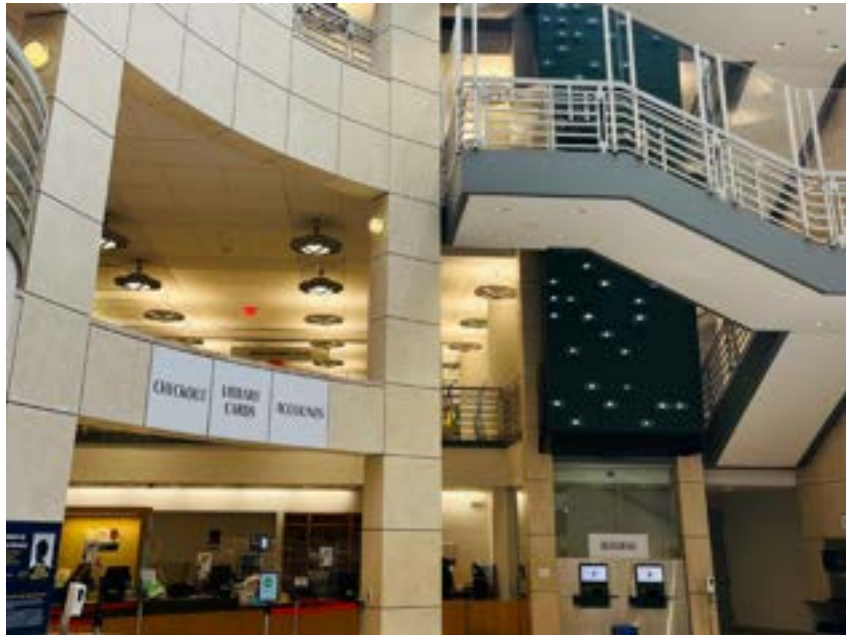
Ida sits at the far corner of the table. She is tiny with a black bob and tinted glasses. She looks like a librarian. I had been homeless and on drugs and alcohol most of my life. I can relate. I was a very broken. I was lost and homeless - and I looked like this, so no one knew. Homelessness has many faces. You learn that too as you work in the library. I talk to anyone and everyone here. I never knew I could have such outgoing conversations. I was an isolated person before. I think that this job is important to the library. I think our lived experience has such an impact on lives because often there is no one else who is going to connect in this way. You know what it's like to be kicked around and rejected. If someone would just listen to you, you might have a chance. I think we change lives here. I ask do you need help with anything? Do you need food? That is my opening and then I'll start engaging with that person and ask about them. Sometimes people don't want services. They like their situation. I will be there to listen to give hope. I will share my testimony. I was like this once. Now I work and I have a home. If you want it we have the resources. This is what I did and I know it works. If you follow this, it might work for you.



SID

Sid came into the library about five years ago, around the same time as Jen. He was introduced by Gina, a street medicine nurse. The street nurses were a partner with the library. Sid shares his story openly. Quick fire. I had a waste away of a mother, no dad I was on the streets by 12 Drunk by 15 Heroin addict by 20 I did that for a good eight or nine years. I'm not good at years but I think I had ten years of no cigarettes last march. And I think I have been 18 years sober. Back then the nurse, Gina who helped me get the job here had openings for a methadone program. They looked for me on the streets for 30 days - and got me into that program - that saved my life.

I went into rehab. Then I got the job here. Some people can't see that that the world is not done with them. You can come back, but you have to want it. I wanted a job. I wasn't doing anything sitting in my house reading. I wanted to do something humble and to help someone. There's a certain joy I get out of getting someone to smile - to get a better day. I tell people I'm not a qualified counsellor but they can just come here to talk, to vent or bitch. I can offer that. I can take it, it's not a big deal. I know that our HASAs have become an inspiration for many of our patrons. I see a number of people from the old days and they see me and they are shocked. I think of libraries as the palaces of the cities. They need to be treated that way.



San Francisco's Healthy Streets Operations Centre



Sam Dodge, San Francisco Department of Emergency Management

San Francisco's Healthy Streets Operations Centre (HSOC) is a good example of a cross government initiative on homelessness that incorporates a street response with welfare outcomes.

The HSOC coordinates many city agencies and partners to:

1. Ensure San Francisco streets are safe and clean
 2. Meet the shelter and service needs of individuals on the street
 3. Establish a unified city response to homelessness and street behaviour.
- Participants represent a wide number of government agencies, committed to meeting regularly. The group includes:
- The Department of Homelessness and Supportive housing (outreach, engagement and placement services)
 - The Department of Public Health (outreach, harm reduction activities, syringe clean up and engagement and health services for people requiring care in street settings)
 - The San Francisco Police Department (engagement and enforcement as a last resort to respond to criminal issues)
 - Public works (cleaning and implementation of environment design changes)
 - The San Francisco Controller's office (performance tracking)
 - 3-1-1 (phone line for non-emergency intake of homeless-related issues from the public)
 - The Department of Emergency Management (operational and logistical support)

The cross-sector approach brings homelessness and health workers, including paramedics, clinicians and behavioural health specialists, to work alongside police, street cleaning and environmental design teams.

The initiative sponsors a number of outreach and response teams and focuses on collaborative approaches to encampment response.

Vision, goals and outcomes are clearly and regularly updated through publicly available dashboards that track homelessness numbers and response operations.

"We work on problems that are too difficult for one department to handle," says Sam Dodge, who coordinates the program through the Department of Emergency Management.

Sam says the initiative, which commenced in 2018, was started by a former politician whose skill was bringing people together.

He would bring all the departments from the city and county into one room, and each would talk about the things they had done to address homelessness.

"Many teams had their own initiatives. There were lots of people involved and lots of overlap.

"The team now is really seasoned. We bring together all the different efforts we have on the streets from different departments.

"Everyone is really motivated on placement... and we're all creative in our response."

Focused activities, like the Tenderloin Emergency Initiative, bring multiple stakeholders together to meet specific area needs.

ORGANISE your approach and your workforce

The process of writing a strategy can be an amazing opportunity to bring council and community together, set common goals and inspire change. But it can also be tedious and at times disingenuous, driven by council officers creating work, ticking boxes and, ultimately, changing very little.

A good strategy can set a community up for success,

Arcacia Housing works with the New York City homeless team

aligning community aspirations with strong internal working arrangements. Local government staff who are skilled, equipped and empowered to make a difference, and a mayor and council ready to lead and support these efforts, will help set up programs for success. Access to funding is integral but may present an issue when activities are considered beyond core council business.



LINKS San Francisco

LEARN ABOUT THE TENDERLOIN EMERGENCY INITIATIVE



READ THE TENDERLOIN EMERGENCY INITIATIVE STRATEGIC PLAN AND OPERATIONS GUIDE



WATCH A VIDEO



Tenderloin Emergency Initiative - Connecting People to Services

HEALTHY STREETS OPERATIONS CENTRE POWERPOINT PRESENTATION (SF POLICE DEPARTMENT)



SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE

Organise your approach and workforce

BUILD A COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY

LEAD AND INFLUENCE GOOD GIVING

STRUCTURE YOUR TEAM FOR SUCCESS

INVOLVE YOUR MAYOR AND MANAGEMENT

RE-THINK AND REALIGN BUDGETS

Build a collaborative strategy

Develop a homelessness strategy, but make sure it is not just 'yours'. A genuine approach to collaboration will bring better outcomes for the whole community by setting clear responsibilities, building stronger relationships and establishing more trust in government.

A well-articulated strategy, built collaboratively by key players, can provide a community with a clear path to address homelessness, set measurable outcomes and keep all involved accountable. It provides a chance for stakeholders to work, design and agree on the outcomes they want to see. It might even reach those who, until now, were not aware or have been reluctant to participate, and encourage them to join the effort. Most importantly, collaboration creates ownership and acknowledges that homelessness response is not just a government responsibility.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

In many interviews I heard about the value of building a co-produced homelessness (or rough sleeping) strategy, written by health services, businesses, anyone who is impacted by or experiencing homelessness. Working together sets up joint responsibility.

- Manchester Council (UK) operates on the approach that homelessness is everybody's business and [Manchester's homelessness Strategy](#) has moved away from being a government document to one that the whole community co-designed, owns and takes responsibility for.

- Washington DC's [Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) (ICH) consists of 16 government agencies, community, business and homelessness specialist organisations, working together on homelessness. By law, the Interagency Council prepares and publishes a strategic plan every five years to guide efforts on homelessness. [Homeward DC 2.0](#) is the second five-year plan published by ICH. It includes 12 goals and 150 strategies that are monitored regularly by the Council.



Washington DC's Homelessness Strategy. Download PDF



David Ireland, World Habitat



“Local government can lead by setting strategy: one thing that everyone is working towards. If local government doesn't have a strategy, they struggle.”
DAVID IRELAND, WORLD HABITAT

- There are many ways to build a homelessness strategy. See case study 2 in this report, about Legislative Theatre.

REFLECTION

Strategy is important and local government can lead efforts in getting a homelessness strategy off the ground. Councils that are brave enough to collaborate closely with community, to listen and even hand over some, or all, of their decision-making power are seeing great success. Genuinely co-designed approaches appreciate all the partnerships that contribute to a successful homelessness response. 🌱

Lead and influence good giving initiatives

Be prepared to have tough conversations with your community about on-street giving. Conversations about alternative ways of helping may be complicated but can redirect goodwill and see better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

“Sometimes we ask other organisations to speak on our behalf when we talk about the negative impacts of giving directly to people on the streets. Our community is more likely to believe it if it does not come from the council.” Government worker, UK

“A big emphasis for us is discouraging people from begging, and helping businesses know what to do [when there is begging near their premises]. We help them understand the difference in groups [who are begging] and their role in resolving the problem.” Government worker, US

The simple presence of street homelessness can, understandably, leave members of a community feeling shocked, saddened and hopeless. In situations where outcomes are seen to be slow, it is not unusual for some people to take action themselves – giving money to people who are begging, dropping off food, clothing and supplies that might make life a little easier for a person who is sleeping rough.

These often spontaneous giving efforts come from a good place but, on the ground, these activities may cause more harm than good, and many local authorities grapple with the unintended consequences of begging, unsafe food distribution practices, discarded bedding and the management of tents and other structures on city streets, in parks or other public locations.

It is also widely understood that these well-intended acts of kindness may also entrench homelessness – a band aid, drawing people away from specialist services that can provide long-term outcomes. Tackling this issue requires balance, and some councils have achieved that through detailed street giving policies and structured donation drives.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Managing spontaneous giving was a common challenge faced by many of the communities I visited. Local authorities grappled with how they might manage on-street giving without discouraging the



tremendous goodwill shown by local communities.

- There are some excellent examples of giving diversion programs, that help educate communities and provide an alternative to direct assistance. In Greater Manchester, UK, [Real Change](#) is an alternative giving campaign. [Real change Wigan and Leigh](#) and [Give Leicester](#) are other examples.

- Article: [Good intentions and old habits are leading us astray on homelessness](#), Beth Watts in The Guardian. “...Community-led and entrepreneurial responses to rough sleeping often develop in complete isolation from evidence and existing expertise... Responses to rough sleeping should be based on evidence, rather than hubris, habit or mere good intentions.”

- Book: [Parsell, C. et.al. Charity and Poverty in Advanced Welfare States](#). Routledge, 2022.

REFLECTION

Councils are in a position to regulate spaces under their control, monitor outputs and forge mentoring partnerships that can help direct charitable initiatives to assist people who need it but not entrench homelessness. Alternative giving programs, clear messaging and strategic partnerships can help influence how on-street assistance is delivered, while managing the unintended impacts of spontaneous giving.

While I did not specifically ask questions about begging, it is an ongoing issue for local governments and there is an education role that can be played in this space. It should be noted that local laws pertaining to begging differ across locations. 🌱

Street kitchen in Glasgow



Real Change Manchester from



1 Structure your teams for success

Working in homelessness is hard. Support your staff by establishing a clear understanding of your goals and shared values. It may be busy but find opportunities to give workers the time they need to think, reflect and grow so they can be successful in their job and avoid burnout.

Working on homelessness response can be tough. Whether people are frontline workers, working behind a desk, a team manager or the head of it all, I heard across the board that officers are often struggling to keep up with the workload, build and maintain partnerships, manage the mental stress, navigate bureaucracy and feel positive when the wins are few.

A number of councils are taking action to support their workforces – paying attention to how shared values can align and drive a team, reviewing the way a team is structured, paying attention to the roles and responsibilities that team members hold and allowing people opportunities to step out of their work to reflect and plan. Well-defined roles and positions with specific scopes, tailored to community needs, appear successful in alleviating chaos and stress.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Values are important – Wigan Council has invested heavily in defining [staff values and culture](#). In the Wigan experience, a willing and aligned workforce with clear parameters results in less conflict. Video: [Rekindling hope: the story of the Wigan Deal](#)

- The Wigan team also invests in making homelessness everyone's business. Their [Eyes and Ears](#) training equips frontline staff to watch out for risk factors leading to homelessness. It takes a similar approach to areas like child safety, where a duty of care requirement might be in place.

- As part of [Active Inclusion Newcastle](#) (UK), The City of Newcastle's homelessness team provides support to a wide number of agency staff and volunteers who work with disadvantaged residents but are not formally specialists in housing, welfare benefits, debt or employment.

- Lambeth Council, in London's south, maintains



The Newcastle Leadership team: L-R James Stewart, Leanne, Sarah Blakey, Peter Scott, Neil Munsfield

a core street outreach team and has brought in a number of key specialist roles, like mental health professionals and prison release navigators, to meet the specific needs of their community. These roles fill gaps and link the work of the outreach team with the rest of council (see case study 9).

- Roles dedicated to homelessness response are important. In Canada, Serge Lareault is [Montreal's Homelessness Commissioner](#). He is the city's advisor and strategic manager on homelessness. The role sits between politics and administration. He writes the plan for the city, comes up with new ideas for the mayor and is the city's spokesperson. "I have to convince many people that solving homelessness is difficult," he told me.

REFLECTION

Capable and well-supported staff are key in a council's homelessness response. However, when funding is limited, forming a team that covers all the skillsets and functions required might be difficult. Homelessness response can also be mentally challenging, so keep a watch on your staff members, making sure they are supported and equipped to do their jobs.

A thorough review of what outcomes you aim to achieve, a clear plan regarding how you will meet your goals and shared values will help keep your team aligned and help identify roles you need to fill. You may need to separate functions so that each staff member has a clear mandate and has the opportunity to build the specialist skills and contacts they need to be successful in their role. ☺

"The people employed to respond never get a chance to sit and think about how it can be different. They are just working on the problem in front of them. The problem is that there is no space to think about the stuff. You are too busy responding to the pressures."
COUNCIL WORKER, UK

2 Involve your mayor and senior management

Equip your mayor and councillors with knowledge and information and involve them in your homelessness efforts. Recognise that they have a voice that can be amplified and an ability to connect that can bring many people along on your journey.

While they might not always have access to large amounts of funds, mayors do hold the microphone and are important advocates, allies and spokespeople on homelessness. Among the many things a mayor can do, they can push and prod other levels of government, influence community discussion and sentiment, bring partners on board and play a key role in fundraising.

Another important point to note is that while mayors and councils are the elected representatives, the power and influence of these executive roles cannot be underestimated. Ensuring the support of your mayor – and senior management – in homelessness response is vital for success.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- In 2021, for the first time, the [Menino Survey of Mayors](#) – an anonymous survey of 126 sitting mayors in the US – included questions about homelessness. See this article about the Survey of Mayors report: [What Do America's Mayors Think About Homelessness?](#)

- The Local Government Association (UK) produced [A councillor's guide to leading the homelessness sector for elected representatives](#). It provides an overview of homelessness responsibilities and issues, and outlines actions that different levels of government might look to pursue.

- Mayors can drive high profile work and use council legislation to drive efforts. A number of high-profile mayors are driving homelessness initiatives and putting their name to it. See: [London's Mayor Sadiq Khan](#), [Manchester's Andy Burnham](#), [San Francisco's Mayor London Breed](#).

- Homelessness is not an easy fix. Mayors who commit to ending homelessness need to be ready to be held accountable. Article: [Mayor Bowser](#)

"Elected leaders need to be willing to lose office and lose their seat to do that right thing. It's a rare dose of courage these days."

BETH STOKES CEO
OF EPISCOPAL
COMMUNITY SERVICES
(US)



Beth Stokes CEO of Episcopal Community Services (US) [promised to end homelessness. Here's how it's going. Washington Post.](#)

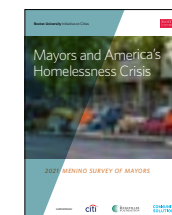
REFLECTION

It's not the platform on which many enter politics, but homelessness can become a highly political issue and elected members can feel the pressure to fix things. The reality is that the relatively short timeframes associated with political cycles and those needed to establish long term solutions to homelessness are not well aligned.

While mayors may not necessarily have the budget or the authority to take big actions on homelessness, the role they can play in setting priorities and sentiments and leading cross community initiatives cannot be under-estimated.

The administrative arm of local government also has a role in informing and supporting elected officials, building their understanding of the situation, and actions taken within a local community.

Keeping mayors informed can have mutually beneficial results. ☺



Mayors and
America's
Homelessness
Crisis
Download PDF



Re-think and realign budgets

Often the primary barrier many councils face when considering their role in homelessness response efforts is a lack of sufficient funds. Rethinking the way councils allocate funds internally, as well as the creation of dedicated funding streams from Commonwealth and State government, can help councils overcome barriers to participation.

“Have a pot of money and instead of asking everyone to do individual jobs, give that pot of money to a group of people and let them work out how they will use it... It doesn't take away competition but it takes away closed conversations.” Linda Hutchinson, alliancing consultant

Small budgets and limited access to external funding means that many councils will decide there is little (or nothing) they can do to prevent or respond to homelessness.

Council budgets are often aligned to organisational structure and renewed year-on-year. Often, this way of working does not accommodate initiatives like homelessness prevention and response, which may require cross-organisational and nimble approaches to meet evolving needs. An approach that breaks away from traditional budgeting practice and supports financial innovation, as well as shared responsibility, could see better results when responding to homelessness.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Firstly, it is important to note that we are not comparing apples with apples when considering local government expenditure on homelessness in the UK, North America and Australia.²³ Budget size and legislated responsibilities vary significantly,

“A lot of silos are created through the separation of budgets, especially where resources are scarce. The pandemic taught us that a pooled budget can help overcome the barriers that prevent someone exiting street homelessness in a sustainable way.”

MADDIE WATKINS, HARINGEY COUNCIL



Maddie Watkins, Haringey Council

however, a number of insights and initiatives can be adapted and applied to an Australian context.

- Haringey Council in North London recognised the way local government budget processes can create silos between departments. Ordinarily, each department has their own budget, with each trying to minimise overspend. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the sharing of budgets and

priorities under Haringey's Everyone In program allowed for the achievement of the lowest number of people sleeping rough in the borough since recording began. The team involved said this was only possible due to pooled resources, shared responsibility and rapid cross-organisational working.

- A re-think of budget processes in funding homelessness services can also build collaboration and improve outcomes. [Alliancing](#) is an approach recently adapted for homelessness response in the UK that brings together multiple stakeholders and multiple budgets to deliver a service.

REFLECTION

While more funding to local government is an absolute need, a shortfall in funds should not be an immediate barrier to councils playing their part in addressing homelessness.

Councils can re-think budget allocations, taking a cross-organisational approach in aligning yearly expenditure. A move away from siloed budgeting (i.e. funding services according to 'product-type' like 'homelessness', 'youth' or 'age care', ') to a focus on cross organisational funding can enable cross-organisational, intervention-focused approaches. These can put available funds to better use, reducing waste and creating economies of scale. ☺

CASE STUDY

A team geared for response in Lambeth



Lambeth is a young, diverse and transitory borough in London's south of around 300,000 residents, including Vauxhall, Waterloo, Clapham and Brixton. It includes some of the richest parts of the country and some of the poorest.

While the number of people sleeping on the streets is not as high as other places (currently around 10 to 20), this has reduced more than tenfold over several years. [Lambeth's](#) experience and approach is a good example of how a council can be committed to addressing rough sleeping while tackling long term upstream issues, rather than just waiting for a crisis.

To do this, Lambeth maintains a street outreach team (of around six people working seven days) and has brought in a number of key specialist roles that work with the team to meet the specific needs of the people they see. These roles fill gaps and link the work of the outreach team with the rest of council. Below is a summary of those roles.

APPROVED MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

A social worker or nurse with extra training to do mental health assessments. This position has more experience and power to section someone. The role is employed by council to sit within homelessness services and is linked to outreach service. This kind of work takes a lot of effort. The worker engages personally. They get to know people individually and build relationships, working with health teams and other partners.

Within 18 months of utilising this role, the number of entrenched rough sleepers in Lambeth has gone down from 10 to four.

STREET POPULATION COORDINATOR (ROUGH SLEEPING COORDINATOR)

The coordinator liaises with the outreach team, other parts of council, businesses, faith groups, and any other relevant people to find out who is sleeping out, and uncover hidden homeless. This role is not part of the street outreach team but regularly goes out with them. It maintains laser focus on wider rough sleeping, knowing where people are from and their circumstances. They are the eyes and ears for the council and play a linkage role. You need the right kind of person to do this role, one who understands homelessness and the ability and confidence to develop and maintain partnerships.



Paul Davis, Lambeth Council

PUBLIC PROTECTION OFFICER

Works alongside the street outreach team, focusing on problematic behaviour issues and anti-social behaviour.

Works directly with people who are congregating at locations. Delivers talks at hostels about begging, sitting on streets, and drinking.

PRISON RELEASE NAVIGATOR

Employed by the council, this position bridges gaps between council, prisons and housing teams, as well as other organisations working in the criminal justice area.

They achieve good results from proactive work. In the last year, the outreach team has seen only one person on the streets who has come out of prison.

JOB NAVIGATORS

Job navigators work within the Council's night shelter for people with no recourse to public funds (mostly immigrants). They work directly with people to understand their skills and past work experience and help them find employment. ☺



²³ The locations I visited as part of my Fellowship were significantly different on the budget front - in terms of size, allocations and situations. UK councils have experienced 10 years of austerity, with average across the board cuts of around 60% of their budgets. However, in England and Wales, through the Homelessness Reduction Act, local government hold statutory responsibility to prevent homelessness and in Scotland, councils have to permanently house people who ask for assistance. Many UK Councils also manage public housing stock. In the US, the cities I visited had significant responsibility and budgets associated with housing and homelessness, as well as access to federal funds. New York City has a right to shelter law, meaning any person without somewhere to stay must be offered a place in the shelter system.

Alliancing removes financial barriers and strengthens partnerships



The City of Glasgow has turned its whole method of commissioning homelessness services on its head. Over a 10-year period, the city is working towards abolishing individual contracts and embracing an alliancing methodology that focuses on results for end users. This also involves the local authority sharing decision-making responsibility with a group of services and people with lived experience.

In 2019, following deep engagement between services, government and people with lived experience of homelessness, the council handed over management of an annual £25 million worth of homelessness response contracts to an alliancing partnership.

Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness brings together a group of organisations that jointly bid for this 'mega-contract'. They share responsibility and work collaboratively, without individual agendas or hierarchy, to plan, make the decisions, and run the processes that aim to end homelessness.

In this alliancing, the council is one of a group of equal partners who each possess the same amount of decision-making power.

While in Glasgow I had the opportunity to meet with Kara Conner, Operations Manager for the Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness and partner in the Alliance and facilitators of the initial design process, Maggie Brunjes, Chief Executive, and Ginny Cooper, Improvement Lead at [Homelessness Network Scotland](#). Before I left Australia, I also spoke via video with Linda Hutchinson, the alliancing expert who advised partners during the set-up process and continues to support the group.

With my head spinning, thinking about all the rules and regulations, all the processes and forms that would not be filled out, my first question was - how on earth could anyone convince a council to share responsibility for a £25 million homelessness spend with a group of not-for-profits and give up their sole decision-making rights?

Maggie Brunjes, who was a part of the fcore team that led the design of the Alliance, explained it like this:

"With any progress that Scotland has achieved, it's often assumed that charities are driving it - because that's how it is in other parts of the world. One of the important learning points to share from Scotland is how close the aspirations are between charities and people who work in local and national government,



Kara Conner, Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness

despite different pressure and challenges.

"While the third sector introduced the concept and model, Glasgow City Council was the key mover in making the alliance happen. They knew they had to spend money differently.

"Where Glasgow got to by 2016 was a realisation that what people wanted was a home - that a housing-led approach had to be front and centre. And the Alliance provided an opportunity to help implement an agreed way forward," Maggie added.

In a separate conversation, Kara Connor explained

GLASGOW ALLIANCE

WE'RE TRANSFORMING GLASGOW'S APPROACH TO HOMELESSNESS AND ENDING ROUGH SLEEPING IN THE CITY



"My brother worked in oil industry in Melbourne and had set up alliance contracting. In that, you have a pot of money and instead of asking everyone to do individual jobs, you give that pot of money to a group of people and let them work out how they will use it."

LINDA HUTCHINSON

that a significant factor in getting the alliance moving was the pre-work that the Homelessness Network Scotland initiated with a large number of stakeholders, including people with a lived experience of homelessness, to gauge the situation and sentiment for change.

In a series of workshops, a wide group of stakeholders - senior management and staff from key organisations, the council, people with lived experience - came together to agree on the principles for a future alliance, what they would want to achieve and behaviour codes.

"We did that work over five sessions," Maggie explained. "And when the alliance was awarded there really was no scope to challenge the principles and objectives that underpinned it."

Homelessness Network Scotland has recorded the process and has some useful FAQs on its [website](#).

This alliancing work also comes with an interesting back story. Run by [Linda Hutchinson](#), a former paediatrician (!) who came across the methodology while on a holiday to Australia (!!) where her brother was using the process to work with the oil industry (!!!).

Linda said: "When I worked for the health service, I saw how money moves around the system and creates silos. I became increasingly aware that the way we finance things influence behaviours.

"My brother worked in oil industry in Melbourne and had set up alliance contracting. In that, you have a pot of money and instead of asking everyone to do individual jobs, you give that pot of money to a group of people and let them work out how they will use it.

"I realised that is what you need in the health services. It doesn't take away competition, but it takes away closed conversations."

The alliancing methodology is best limited to a smaller group - Linda says around eight partners maximum - and rests on a few key agreed ways of working:

- Collective responsibility
- Decision making that is driven by what is best for people
- Unanimous decision making by all parties (big and small orgs, government and non-government have the same voice)
- No fault, no blame.

COVID did slow down the progression of the Glasgow Alliance and Kara said they are still working out some of the finance modelling but they are making progress with new services coming into play as old contracts end.

One question around the model is how organisations and services that were not successful in being part of the group can participate in service delivery. It's something that Kara says the group is aware of and decisions will be made by the alliance to allocate work to those best suited to deliver it.

A full case study, outlining the alliancing approach can be found [here](#).

GUIDELINES

ACT to prevent and end homelessness



New York train station outreach at midnight. (L-R) Eugene Robinson, Muzzy Rosenblatt

Councils may not have the money or jurisdiction to respond to homelessness but, more often than not, homelessness is a local issue and communities expect a response. While some Australian councils can consider housing options, for many, housing is too expensive and the amount local government can contribute pales next to what Commonwealth and State governments can offer.

While situations and systems differ between the UK, US, Canada and Australia, it was evident that no matter what the circumstances, councils do have several tools to respond at the crisis level of homelessness. By knowing what these opportunities are, and being ready to utilise them, councils can play a role in responding to and ending homelessness.

“There is a big push for housing first as the only way to properly solve homelessness, and philosophically I agree. But I feel it holds back our ability to make things better for as many people as possible because, if you don’t get the absolute gold standard, then the alternative is you do nothing and that seems like a massive waste of opportunity. And, in the meantime, people suffer.”

MUZZY ROSENBLATT, BOWERY RESIDENTS COMMITTEE (BRC) NEW YORK

Act to prevent and end homelessness

DO WHAT YOU CAN TO INFLUENCE HOUSING SUPPLY

RE-FOCUS PREVENTION

BRING IN YOUR LIBRARIES

KNOW WHAT YOU CAN OFFER IN A CRISIS

1 Do what you can to influence housing supply

Use planning powers to control and direct influence over your housing supply. Ensure collaboration between council planners and homelessness service staff to create opportunities to negotiate on planning scheme submissions. This can directly influence the amount of social and affordable housing in your municipality.

While Australian local government experience in managing housing is very different to the UK and North America, there are still things we can learn, particularly about how councils might assist without providing direct housing supply.

Actions that a council might take include utilising planning controls and advocating for housing supply.

When it comes to approving new social or affordable housing through the local planning scheme, councils may find themselves at the frontline of community opposition, a situation that always needs to be navigated with care.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- The UK has adopted mandatory inclusionary zoning, requiring developers to include a proportion of affordable units when they build market rate housing. Article: [Examining the Impact of London’s Mandatory Inclusionary Housing](#)
- Another option for councils to influence local housing supply is via council rates. In Wales (a location I did not visit), councils are now able to classify homes as primary residences, second homes or holiday lets and raise [discretionary council tax premiums](#) for second homes to 300 per cent. The government hopes this will help keep more properties available for local people.

“You might not control the building and how long a person can stay, but there is something in your purview [that you can do]. Find that and make the change that you can.”

ILLANA BRANDA, MONTGOMERY COUNTY (US)



Illana Branda, Montgomery County (US)

- The Constellation Project (Australia) has written a simple brochure explaining the concept of [Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning](#).
- AHURI government brief: [What role can local government play in delivering affordable housing?](#)

REFLECTION

We know that housing ends homelessness. However, in an Australian context, this is the area where local government has the least influence. This should not be an excuse for doing nothing.

Although some Australian councils are able to contribute to housing supply, most do not have the capacity to do so. One of the few levers local government holds is control over the local planning scheme. Planning controls, permits and zoning considerations are all viable tools at a council’s disposal. Through negotiation with property developers, these can be used to direct and influence supply.

Good planning and a clear position on housing will also help councils respond to any community concern or opposition regarding local development of social and affordable housing. In extreme circumstances, councils may look to temporary accommodation options. (See some interim housing options in case study 15 – Facing rising homelessness and a growth of encampments – Halifax’s response)

Re-focus prevention

15

Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy (2021) <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/5074/gmhps-final-july-21.pdf>



Greater Manchester Mission for Preventing Homelessness²⁴

People

Participation

Prevention

MISSION

Everyone can access and sustain a home that is safe, decent, accessible and affordable

Everyone leaves our places of care (care, health facility, prison, asylum) with a safe place to go

Everyone can access quality advice, advocacy and support to prevent homelessness

People experiencing homelessness have respite, recovery and re-connection support

Homelessness is not an entrenched or repeat experience

STAGES OF HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

UNIVERSAL

Preventing or minimising homelessness risks across the population at large e.g. poverty reduction across the whole population.

TARGETED

Preventing or minimising homelessness risks across the population at large e.g. poverty reduction across the whole population.

CRISIS

Preventing homelessness likely to occur within 56 days, in line with legislation across Great Britain on 'threatened with homelessness' e.g. provision of temporary accommodation.

EMERGENCY

Support for those at immediate risk of homelessness, especially sleeping rough e.g. provision of temporary accommodation

RECOVERY

Prevention of repeat homelessness and rough sleeping e.g. Housing First to prevent recurrence of homelessness

Make the most of the community connection points that councils hold and build organisational-wide skills and responsibilities for early interventions that prevent homelessness.

When it comes to homelessness, prevention is often seen as the most important intervention of all. However, prevention methods are often hard to articulate and measure in a local government context. Therefore, they often sit secondary to crisis response.

Prevention activities are often categorised as:

Primary: eliminating risk factors before homelessness becomes an issue e.g. education or job training

Secondary: assisting people who are just approaching the crisis response system and may need assistance to cover rent arrears or cash to pay bills; and

Tertiary: actions to eliminate repeated homelessness, which include actions like supplying housing.

While councils reach into many parts of the community with a broad health and wellbeing focus and also carry community planning and development responsibilities, these might not be recognised as

Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick is a thought-leader on homelessness and co-authored a prevention model that can guide councils.



homelessness prevention activities. It is here that an important opportunity may be lost.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

• There is a lot that Australian councils can learn from counterparts in the UK, where prevention is a legislated responsibility for local authorities. [The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017](#) is a significant piece of legislation that reformed existing protections for some categories of homeless people. It places legal duties on English councils so that everyone at risk of homelessness has access to advice to prevent it. It also requires housing authorities to work with anyone (irrespective of their priority need status) to relieve their situation within 56 days of them becoming homeless. See also [Policy fact sheet](#): Homelessness prevention duty.

• The Newcastle City Council in northern England is well known (and [awarded](#)) for its work on [homelessness prevention](#), primarily run through the [Active Inclusion Newcastle](#) initiative. An Evaluation by Heriot-Watt University (Scotland) provides a good overview of the work: [Homelessness prevention in Newcastle: Examining the role of the 'local state' in the context of austerity and welfare reforms](#).

• Greater Manchester's [Homelessness Prevention Strategy](#) (2021) is another good practice example. It includes The Greater Manchester Mission for preventing homelessness (model illustrated) that utilises [Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood's](#) five stage typology of homelessness prevention, focusing on universal,

"A lot of councils don't see homelessness as a problem because they have relatively few rough sleepers, but that does not mean other types of homelessness don't exist. Prevention stops you getting to crisis point."

DAVID IRELAND, WORLD HABITAT (UK)

targeted, crisis, emergency and recovery. The approach encourages practitioners to be systematic in approach, analyse what triggers homelessness and pay attention to where homelessness originates. "[The model] is a way to organise thoughts," said author, Professor Suzanne Fitzpatrick. "It can help flag opportunities for councils to respond."

Building a good understanding of the main factors leading to homelessness in a community can help frame prevention activities, assisting a local community in deciding where to focus efforts. For example, in its Homelessness Prevention Plan, to help direct prevention activities to the right place, Greater Manchester identified the following groups as being at highest risk of homelessness:

• People who have: underlying health conditions, including poor mental health; low paid and insecure work; a disability; caring responsibilities; poor

connectivity where they live.

• People with experience of: human trafficking and modern slavery; childhood trauma; the criminal justice system; sleeping rough; sex work; gender-based discrimination.

• People who are: under 35, in particular, care leavers; from ethnic minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and other sexual orientations and identities; migrants, asylum seekers, including those who have no recourse to public funds¹

REFLECTION

Homelessness prevention activities are wide in scope and councils are often well equipped to respond, but often the opportunities for early intervention are overlooked.

Perhaps the heightened focus that councils tend to place on rough sleeping, as the most visible form of homelessness, adds to this misinterpretation of council response opportunities, with many people only thinking of homelessness when crisis hits.

It is helpful to consider what you do across the organisation. Whether they are specific life stage activities or economic and social inclusion initiatives, stop looking at work individually and start thinking about cross organisational initiatives that can grab opportunities for intervention, and initiate actions early on. ☺

Bring in your libraries – and other customer service staff

“Our model of social work works well in libraries because libraries are so deeply connected in community. They are a safe space without the bureaucracy attached. You can just walk in without making an appointment or sitting in a clinical room. Libraries are welcoming democratic spaces. It doesn’t matter how you dress or what look like when you come into a library, you will still be welcome. I think that’s important – the democratic welcoming nature and the fact that on the whole you can walk into any branch and the expectation is that there is a sense of care and duty of care. Not many public institutions are like that.”
ANNA FAVRETTO, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY



Anna Favretto, New York Public Library

Recognise the value of your colleagues who work with your community but are not the homelessness ‘experts’. With the right training and support they can be valuable allies in identifying and responding to homelessness.

It may not be in their job title or standard job description, but customer-facing staff (like librarians, customer relations officers, park rangers, local laws officers) who work out in the community every day may be great allies in identifying people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Through the nature of their jobs, these staff

members may have many opportunities to observe and sometimes get to know individuals and, importantly, build trusting relationships that can be invaluable when connecting with people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Formal social work programs, placing trained professionals to assist staff and customers at service points like libraries are proving to be extremely effective tools to address homelessness.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Public libraries, as an arm of local government, are extremely well positioned as free, welcoming spaces, locations of learning, information management and community connection. In a number of locations they have proven to be effective spaces to connect, engage and respond to the needs of people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

- San Francisco Public Library was one of the first in the world to establish a library social work program. Read Leah Esguerra’s [first hand account about being a library social worker](#). See PBS news story: [Library social worker helps homeless seeking quiet refuge](#)

- Peer support programs in libraries are proving a very successful tool to connect with people facing multiple disadvantage, including homelessness. Washington DC’s public libraries run a peer support program. This video introduces the team, their approach and some of their stories: [DC Public Library’s Peer Navigator Program](#).

- Read about [Melbourne’s Library Social Work](#) program, with tips to assist locations set up their own.

- In Wigan and Newcastle Councils in the UK, homelessness teams run training for council



L-R With Leah Esguerra and Michael Lambert, City Librarian. Senior management support has been vital in San Francisco’s success

colleagues who are not homelessness specialists. This training helps staff, whose jobs connect them with community members, understand the causes and impacts of homelessness and how to undertake referrals when needed. See [Eyes and Ears Training](#) (Wigan) and [Trigger point conversation information sheets](#) (Newcastle – search ‘trigger’ on the webpage).

REFLECTION

A lot of opportunity exists for councils in establishing local connection points through frontline services. This is one intervention that really builds on the specific role that councils play in a community and differentiates them from other levels of government.

A common misconception that I have observed working in local government teams responding to homelessness, is that only the people with specific roles can do the job. Library social work initiatives in the US, Canada and now Australia/New Zealand are proving that addressing homelessness can be everybody’s business. Community locations, like libraries, are accessible and non-threatening and are proving to be good places for connection with people facing multiple disadvantage, including homelessness. Well supported workers (it is important to remember that librarians and councils staff working in other customer service roles are not social workers) can play an important role in local homelessness response. ☺



Social Work in Australian Public Libraries: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Social Justice

Know what you can offer in crisis response 17

Local Government is in a good position to convene on-the-ground crisis response activities, tapping into local networks and connections. Know where you can add value and take an informed, human rights approach that considers the needs of all members of your community.

While it comprises less than 10 per cent of Australia's homelessness situation, the high visibility of rough sleeping often leaves many believing it is the only way that homelessness is experienced. While more people experience homelessness sleeping in cars, couch surfing and living in places without security of tenure (like rooming houses or in over-crowded locations), the reality is that most councils will focus their efforts (if any) on assisting people who are sleeping rough.

While this report aims to identify a variety of actions councils can take at different stages of the homelessness journey, the reality remains that homelessness often manifests most visibly on streets. Therefore, councils are often looked upon to offer rapid street-based responses.

Four particular interventions where councils may lead homelessness response came up consistently in my Fellowship travels. They are not the only crisis response activities in which council might get involved, but they were, in my experience, the most common. These were:

- 1) Service coordination
- 2) On-street outreach
- 3) Welfare and service hubs
- 4) Response to encampments

i. Service coordination

"In the past five years there has been a move to increased specialisation in homelessness response – generalists making contact, intensive case management outreach with smaller numbers of people, the rise and integration of street medicine, multidisciplinary teams all working together. The challenge is, unless you have a good backbone organisation coordinating, they trip over each other trying to find the same people. You need



a centralised brain that holds street outreach together." Iain DeJong, Org Code (Canada)

Service coordination activities ensure that the right organisations are around the table when addressing homelessness, that people's needs are known (often through the use of [by name lists](#)), and that, as a result, efforts are not duplicated or people miss out on the support they need.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Many councils in Australia and overseas are leading service coordination efforts, capitalising on their ability to bring various homelessness and other services together to respond to the needs of identified rough sleepers. See this example about [Port Phillip Council](#) (Victoria), who have signed up to the [Advance to Zero](#) initiative.

L-R Street outreach teams, New York City and Manchester City



Iain DeJong, Org Code

"All politics is ultimately local. Whether things sit with the State or Federal government, homelessness is a local issue – and local government is not only responding to homelessness, but responding to the discomfort felt by it."
IAIN DEJONG, ORG CODE

ii. On-street outreach

"You need some separation between crisis interventions and long-term outreach. At a specific moment someone might need a specific crisis response, managed by a centralised team, like a particularly skilled emergency management service, police or a nurse team. And then you need another team who works with those who have long term needs." Homelessness worker, US

Outreach teams, managed through councils and working with people sleeping rough, were funded by federal and state governments in many locations that I visited in the UK and US. These teams offered on-the-street assistance, linking people into the services and providing somewhere to refer cases. At some locations, business groups funded outreach teams that were operated by homelessness services and coordinated through local government.

I heard from a number of people that the way street outreach teams are structured makes a difference. Think about the skillsets of your outreach workers (it's not an entry level position, but often ends up that way) and define roles (i.e. those making initial client contact, others working on housing applications, others liaising with council and compliance). See case study 9 on Lambeth's outreach roles.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- Montgomery county (US) runs a number of outreach teams working with people sleeping rough. At Montgomery County and some other locations, local businesses were funding separate outreach teams to respond to complaints and make service connections in specific areas. [Montgomery County \(US\) flyer regarding outreach](#)
- [Assertive Outreach Resource](#) (Australia), Council to Homeless Persons (CHP)
- The [Changing Futures](#) program is funded through the UK government and aims to help local outreach workers identify and remove system barriers, improving outcomes. (See case study 13 – Changing futures – a continuous improvement model addressing multiple disadvantage)

iii. Service Hubs

Service hubs provide one stop shops for homelessness assistance. I saw a few examples of these operations in the UK and US, bringing together a wide variety of organisations into one location. →



“This place is about the relationships with people on the streets. We don’t have rules and regulations. We don’t bar people. We have a flexible approach. Almost all of our services are drop in. People get to know what is happening at the hub. Some of the stuff we have in the hub creates structure. People know when they can come in”.

SIOBHAN PAGE, SIMON COMMUNITY HUB (SCOTLAND)

Working with partners, local government is in a good position to coordinate these activities.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

[Simon Community Scotland](#), runs a service hub in central Glasgow which works closely with the local council. They provide dozens of services, ranging from legal aid to GP and pharmacist appointments, barbering services, food banks and pet care. The new site also provides space for various services to work, allowing greater connections and collaboration.

- [Mustard Tree](#) in Manchester, which operates seven days a week, offers many activities plus a well-stocked food bank and second-hand furniture and clothing. A Wednesday drop-in service, hosted by police and other partners, brings many local services into the space to work directly with clients.

iv. Encampments

“Cities don’t have the tools or knowledge regarding what to do about encampments. There is growing political and public pressure to take a compliance response. Municipal governments struggle with what to do. They don’t have the money of other levels of government and so they use the tools they have - which is enforcement”. Tim Richter, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness

Responses to encampments were particularly visible in the US and Canada. While encampments had been a concern over many years, I heard that situations had become worse since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic when virus transmission in crowded indoor areas became a concern. Responses to encampments differ significantly across locations and are often driven by political considerations and influenced by public pressure.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

In Canada, many communities (and in effect, councils) are struggling to respond to encampments. Their situation is highly comparable to Australia where they have little jurisdiction but are often held responsible by the community and asked to respond. Many resources are available to help guide communities.

- [The National Protocol for Homelessness Encampments in Canada](#) aims to encourage a human rights approach in addressing encampments.
- The Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness and [Org Code Consulting](#) have released guidelines, providing practical approaches for Councils: [Ending homelessness for people living in encampments in Canada](#).

(L) Jeanann Webster, Simon Community Scotland



Simon Community Scotland’s homelessness hub in Glasgow

CASE STUDY

Improving service coordination programs through changing futures



In the Borough of Rochdale, part of the Greater Manchester area, a multi-disciplinary team meeting focuses on case management for one high-needs client with high medical risk. The team comes together to work on multiple health, hygiene and drug and alcohol responses.

Over a video call, council housing and adult services officers work with nursing and frontline support services to address each of the client’s complex needs.

It was at this meeting I first heard about the [Changing Futures](#) program and saw its work in action. This is a three-year, £64 million programme, implemented at 15 innovation sites across the UK.

Greater Manchester, of which Rochdale is part, is one of those sites. The program focuses on people facing multiple disadvantage – any combination of experiences of homelessness, mental ill-health, substance misuse and contact with the criminal justice system. On-the-ground teams feed back what they learn to the [Greater Manchester Combined Authority](#), who oversee the program.

In the team meeting was Tony, who works for a local charity, [Sanctuary Trust](#). He sits in one of four Changing Futures-funded positions in Rochdale and is using the opportunity to work on a small case load, picking out people who slip between the cracks and looking at what barriers they face in the system.

During the meeting, the team is discussing what can be done to clean up a client’s flat. It is scattered with syringes, making it impossible for health services to access and work with the resident. The team is calling on every option to help the person to stay healthy. Unable to find a cleaning service to do the work, Tony and a colleague have gone in and done the job themselves.

Afterwards Tony tells me that in his job, he is constantly testing and seeding different ideas, collecting data and experiences from multiple situations.

A key objective of the Changing Futures program is to find the barriers that people face, solve them and then feed solutions back into the system to ensure long term improvement and change.

“We try to be a gold standard around support we offer,” says program partner Clare Gray from the not-for-profit The Bond Board. “We ask people to look to



Above: Tony McManus
Below: The Sanctuary Trust centre that he works from



what we are doing and how we deliver support... We take time to test and learn and figure out what we are doing wrong.”

And system change is the outcome that the team works towards.

“We are system disrupters,” she says. “We have the freedom and resources to stop and say something is not right, rather than letting things build.”

Rochdale Council has a seat at this table, but housing project officer Sean Beech says they are not there to tell people what to do.

“We act as the commissioner but we also want to be close to the ground. We don’t want to sit in an ivory tower and be prescriptive. We want to learn as the work is being done,” he details.

Some of Tony’s colleagues have nicknamed him ‘the homelessness google’ because of his wide knowledge and connections. He also draws on his own lived experience. “There are multiple disadvantages covered by the Changing Futures program and I hit all five,” he tells me.

Now he likes to work with people with a “living experience” of homelessness to know what barriers they come up against and how the system can better assist them.

The Changing Futures programme has adopted much of the learning from the [Fulfilling Lives](#) initiative that ran for eight years and established a ground breaking response working with people facing multiple disadvantage.

A model for prevention in Newcastle



A lot has been written about Newcastle's Active Inclusion homelessness response. They won a prestigious [World Habitat award](#) in 2020.

Amidst the severe budget cuts brought about by the UK's austerity measures, which started more than a decade ago, the Active Inclusion Newcastle initiative has still managed to bring together multiple partners focusing on homelessness prevention.

The interesting element of Newcastle's approach is that the homelessness and housing team (headed by [Neil Munslow MBE](#)) works across council to connect with people and programs that focus on many elements of a person's life journey - effectively busting internal silos.

As a council worker, I have often reflected on the fact that we are usually quite good at reaching out into the community but don't pay enough attention to, or place value on, all the things our own council delivers or holds responsibility for, particularly those things that are not directly labelled 'homelessness response'.

I think Newcastle is a great example of what can be achieved when you focus on working with both external and internal partners. Despite enduring huge budget cuts, Newcastle has relatively low homelessness/rough sleeping numbers - and this could be attributed to this vast suite of work.

Their approach also left me thinking about how councils might only focus on homelessness when at crisis point. But often this is too late. There is so much that can be done before getting there. However, we need foresight to do something.

The Active Newcastle 2021-22 briefing note covers Newcastle's approach and actions. Listed here are some examples of the actions Newcastle takes:

- Understand the local impact based on our context and the life courses, pathways and risk triggers that affect Newcastle residents.
- Segment need to provide proportionate, personally relevant and cost-effective responses.
- Align budget processes to support the most vulnerable to prevent crisis.
- Develop citywide consensus and partnership responses. Routinely monitoring and reviewing with partners helps us understand and show how we use our limited resources to make a positive difference to improve residents' lives and identify opportunities for improvement and innovation.



- Provide infrastructure support, information, training and workforce development to help partners who are not specialists in financial inclusion and homelessness prevention to identify risk and act to prevent crisis, rather than just to refer to crisis services. Maximise the value of touch, trigger and transition points.

- Provide partnerships and protocols - agreed ways of working that give consistent governance and practice to increase financial inclusion and prevent homelessness, for example, the policy of no evictions into homelessness.

- Provide universal information to prevent residents becoming more vulnerable (this includes the [Active Inclusion Newcastle website resources](#)).

- Adapt core council to directly deliver and commission specialist support, care and therapeutic services for residents who are known to be vulnerable. Enable them to identify and prevent the risk of financial exclusion and homelessness.

- Target support to shield the most vulnerable and to prevent crisis, including specialist financial inclusion, homelessness prevention and employment advice and support services. This is supported by the Newcastle Gateway web-based system which helps to match 24,415 residents with 67 services.

- Catch residents who are 'not known' to be at risk through open access information and advice services, learning how we can identify risk and prevent crisis earlier.

- Carry out systematic exception reporting to support collective reviews of why we haven't prevented financial exclusion or homelessness (e.g. because of performance, policy, provision, or

LINKS Newcastle

HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS ADVICE IS DIVIDED INTO THREE SECTIONS ON THE [NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL WEBSITE](#):
[What to do if you need housing advice or are homeless](#)



[What to do if you see someone sleeping rough](#)



[Information for professionals and volunteers: housing and homelessness](#)



SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE

Active Inclusion Newcastle - visualising our system's aims & outcomes

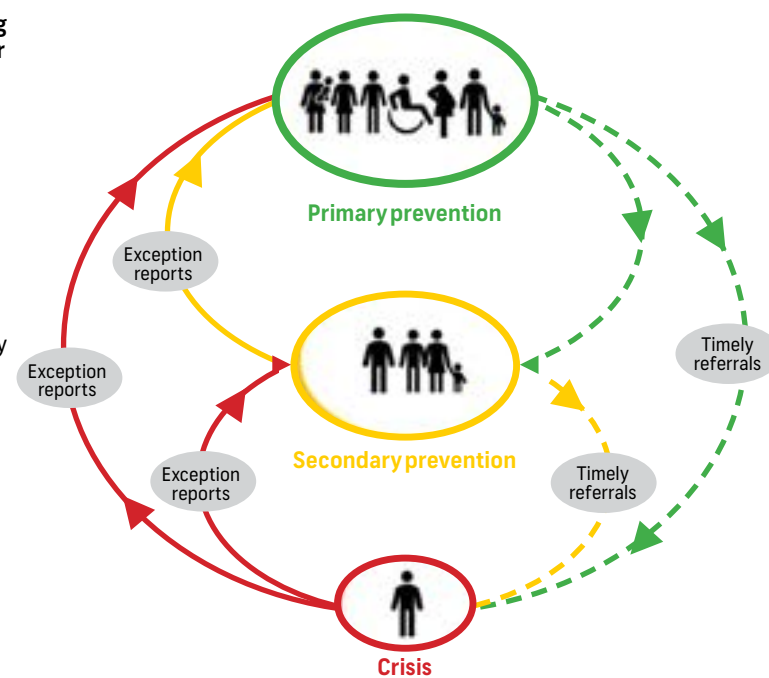
OUR APPROACH - understanding & connecting with resident's touch, trigger & transition points

- Collaborating & adapting to identify & prevent crisis/: information, training, reviews, policy, protocol & commissioning

- Target specialist advice & support to vulnerable groups

- Exception reports, to identify prevention opportunities

- Catching residents if we fail to prevent homelessness and destitution



Using feedback loops to improve outcomes Examples 2021-22

- 230,000 information now visits
- 92,994 website visits
- 3,586 information subscribers
- 392 people trained
- 144 partner agencies

- 27,555 residents advised
- 4,569 cases of homelessness prevented
- 19,360 residents help to secure £20,276,427
- 3,452 residents received debt advice
- 1,073 non-emergency admits to support accommodation

- 250 people found sleeping rough & offered accommodation
- 0 B&B use
- 0 Evictions into homelessness
- 429 emergency bed admits

commissioning issues) and problem solving to avoid repeat cases.

- Consider the balance of individual, systemic and structural causes of exclusion.

- Provide good environments and services, e.g. [Cherry Tree View](#), [Changing Lives Living at Bentinck Terrace](#) and Karen's story.

In a recent [blog](#), Ella Hancock from World Habitat (UK) identified how, instead of waiting for people to reach crisis point, the Active Inclusion Newcastle partnership proactively identifies and provides support through:

- **Primary prevention activities:** Ensuring that all existing services for vulnerable residents proactively work to identify 'trigger points' and a potential risk of homelessness. Newcastle has provided a large number of non-housing related staff (including counsellors and volunteers) with training to help identify and respond to residents who may be at risk of homelessness.

- **Secondary prevention activities:** targeted specialist advice and support to people at risk of homelessness, providing specialist information and advice on key issues such as housing, debt and welfare.

- **Crisis activities:** catching residents experiencing homelessness who have not been previously identified as being at risk and providing emergency food, gas, electricity and clothing support, alongside street outreach.

Ella identifies the proactive partnership element as

"If we have a secret, it's routine collection of information regarding the relationship between demand and supply. We also have routine questioning - aka reviews - and asking what works and what doesn't work - aka curiosity."

NEIL MUNSLOW, NEWCASTLE CITY COUNCIL

a crucial factor in the program's success, including its removal of previous competition over budgets and contracts. She also cites the consistent and collective approach of the Newcastle Gateway - "a web-based single access system shared between 76 services, which underpins the joint approach by matching resident need with available services."

Another element that I noticed in Newcastle's success is the team's focus on communication. A significant amount of work has been undertaken to ensure that Newcastle's activities and approach is easily accessible to multiple stakeholders online.

"If we have a secret, it's routine collection of information regarding the relationship between demand and supply," said Neil Munslow. "We also have routine questioning - aka reviews - and asking what works and what doesn't work - aka curiosity."

These sections provide a wealth of information and links for three key groups: people in need of service support; people who are concerned about someone sleeping rough, and people working or volunteering in homelessness and/or housing response. 📄

In Baltimore, peer recovery specialists bring lived experience into libraries



The junction of Pennsylvania and North Avenues, where you'll find a branch of Baltimore's Enoch Pratt Public Library, is a busy place. The area is a transit hub. There's a drug treatment centre nearby and lots of street activity all around. It was also the epicentre of the 2015 riots responding to the death of resident, Freddie Gray in police custody.

Passing a significant amount of security to enter the library, and walking up some stairs to the first floor, a few people sit at computers or around at desks, chatting. There is a bright table by some windows. The table has been carefully set up - COVID test kits, masks and boxes of Narcan are on display.

"It's all about the display," Donna Bruce comments, as she does a little set design at the location. At the table next to her, two social workers wait and receive a steady stream of people.

"Have you been Narcan trained?," she asks. "We'll do that before you leave. It's real quick."

"I used it on someone here recently," Donna continues. "It took four doses of Narcan and then I did mouth-to-mouth, but he survived, and he came back the next week to thank me."

"But you have to be really careful when you administer it. People don't know what is going on, they might jump at you."

Donna's association with the library started when she and other peers were approached by local councillor Zeke Cohen to run a pilot peer recovery program at the library, a collaboration between the council, the Enoch Pratt Public Library and a local peer advocacy, outreach and training group, the [Maryland Peer Advisory Council](#) (MPAC). The need for a library program arose after a spate of overdoses and a number of patrons presenting at the library with needs relating to substance use, homelessness, mental health and domestic violence. Library management wanted to do something, not kick people out.

Looking out the library windows you get a long view across the street, including to the drug store that was burned down during the riots, Donna points out the spot where her son died about a year ago. He had a history of mental illness and drug use, she tells me.

"At first, I wasn't sure I would be able to do this

Donna says that the library's Peer Navigation Program is well known in the community and helps in a number of ways, including assisting people to apply for jobs, helping with food insecurity issues, or arranging transport for health appointments. Community members will often seek out the navigators and in turn, the navigators will negotiate on behalf of patrons.

work," Donna says.

"I did not want to come here, but I feel his presence."

"No one was there for my son. But when I am here, it helps me release. I am engaging and walking around, making sure that people are safe."

"No one was around for my son, but we are here now. This has created new meaning in my life."

Donna now leads a group of trained [Peer Recovery Specialists](#) - people with lived experience - who are present, approachable and trusted by community, who can provide one-on-one assistance in the library.

The Peer Navigation Program started in the library last year and is an extension of work undertaken in a number of public locations in Baltimore, including hospitals and courthouses.

Peer Recovery Specialists are trained through the [Maryland Addiction and Behavioral-health Professionals Certification Board](#), a private, non-partisan corporation offering international and state level credentials in various forms of health work.

They run a peer support accreditation that covers a

variety of skill areas and is offered free to people with lived experience of mental health or substance use, or their family members.

In the library, these accreditations are offered via supervised, 500-hour internships with Donna, who also built her qualifications through the program.

Donna says that the library's Peer Navigation Program is well known in the community and helps in a number of ways, including assisting people to apply for jobs, helping with food insecurity issues, or arranging transport for health appointments. Community members will often seek out the navigators and in turn, the navigators will negotiate on behalf of patrons.

"The neighbourhood supports the position and knows who I am," Donna says.

"I come up with resources for people. I can get on the phone and call people."

"I invite people in. I am thinking about creating ways to break stigma and include people. Make it inclusive."

Donna Bruce, Enoch Pratt Library, Baltimore

"Often, I jump into situations before the rules set in."

Donna is clear that it takes a certain kind of person to be a successful peer navigator, and not everyone who has come into the program has worked out.

What are the factors for success as a Peer Recovery Specialist? Here are Donna's thoughts:

"You need someone with lived experience, but not someone who is actively still unhealthy. They need a certain time in sobriety. The language that they use - you can hear if it's someone who is healthy."

"They need motivation. Why are they motivated to do this work? It's certainly not the pay."

"And [what are] the goals that they want to meet. Someone might want to break stigma, to provide resources, [or] add to the longevity and sustainability of the program."

"How familiar are they with the community? Do they know how to find resources? Do they have a rapport with other offices? Those are all plusses." ☺



Urban Alchemy: Transforming the energy in traumatised urban spaces



The Tenderloin district in San Francisco is known as a place of poverty and homelessness. Sitting up against the city's civic centre and wealthy inner-city areas, it forms much of the reputation that San Francisco holds as being a place of deep economic contrasts and high homelessness rates.

Walking into the Tenderloin, streetscapes change quickly. You'll find rundown apartment buildings and security bars on shops. A couple of parks with new children's play equipment have tall gates with gatekeepers situated to welcome folks in - and probably keep others out. People gather all along the streets, some with goods to sell, others talking in groups and some sitting alone.

My meeting with the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing is at their offices in the Tenderloin. The entrance has a high fence. When it turns out the person I am meeting has not left my name at the door, security guards sitting behind glass doors move me along without an option to speak my case.

But along the street, there are some smiling faces, people dressed in black with 'Urban Alchemy' written in bright green across their backs. There are a few of them at every intersection and some outside public restroom facilities. They stand around, a few talk to people or amongst themselves. A couple catch my eye, giving me a nod as I walk past.

The reality is, I feel much safer walking alone here than in a number of other neighbourhoods I have visited in the United States. And the lack of police presence and security guards definitely contributes to this, rather than making it feel unsafe.

Jeff Kositsky used to head up San Francisco's Department of Homelessness and Supported Housing and essentially set up the whole agency. "I don't regret doing it," he said, reflecting on the challenges and successes of his role. "But it was probably the worst five years of my life."

While in his government job, Jeff worked with Urban Alchemy (UA) to establish street cleaning, hygiene services, community engagement, and



Urban Alchemy workers in downtown San Francisco

transitional housing. He is now Urban Alchemy's chief growth officer, working on national expansion of the UA model, organisational development and fundraising.

The Urban Alchemy model is unique. It was conceived by Lena Miller and Bayron Wilson, who grew up in the same, tough neighbourhood in the San Francisco area. Bayron served a long sentence in prison. Lena went on to get a doctorate in psychology.



L-R With Urban Alchemy founders, Bayron Wilson and Lena Miller



With Jeff Kositsky

"The approach in the Tenderloin is around community and safety. People are accustomed to seeing men and women on the corner doing something unsafe. To see someone on the side of the street saying good morning, and with a smile, is very different."

BAYRON WILSON, URBAN ALCHEMY

UA is a social enterprise that captures the knowledge and skills of people formally incarcerated for 15 years or more - effectively life sentences - who come out of the prison system with relatively few opportunities available to them. The program provides more than 40 hours of training and above minimum wage jobs, capitalising on the skills that a formally incarcerated person may have - education, emotional intelligence, an ability to deal with traumatised people and places.

"I contracted UA when I worked for the city. No one else would do the stuff they were willing to try. The quality and willingness of the people who work here is what makes the difference," Jeff offered.

Urban Alchemy is contracted in San Francisco and at other locations in the US to deliver four core services.¹

1. Community Engagement and Outreach:

calming neighbourhoods and public spaces by forming bonds with residents, promoting positive behaviour, and connecting people to services; this work includes placing outreach workers and community engagement specialists in neighbourhoods as well as providing first-responders to non-emergency 911 calls related to homelessness, mental health, and addiction

2. Interim Housing:

operating safe camping, safe parking, tiny homes, hotels, and other types of client-centred, low-barrier alternatives to sleeping in public spaces

3. Hygiene Services:

providing and monitoring safe, clean, and welcoming public bathrooms and mobile showers that offer dignity to those in need while improving public health

4. Street Cleaning:

removing garbage and debris from streets and other public spaces, restoring a sense of pride to neglected communities

"Being formally incarcerated and getting a pretty good education, I have never seen anything done on this scale," said Urban Alchemy co-founder Bayron Wilson. "We are giving opportunity to people with lived experience. Working with human lives and people on the street. Who better to do this than someone who has gone through it?"

"The approach in the Tenderloin is around community and safety. People are accustomed to seeing men and women on the corner doing something unsafe. To see someone on the side of the street saying good morning, and with a smile, is very different.

"That person, once upon the time, may have continued to hold a negative opinion of the community. But you have an opportunity to turn that around. [Turning] a base metal into gold - that's the alchemy."

It is well worth visiting the [Urban Alchemy](#) website to learn more about their approach. This [video](#) is also a great way of seeing their work in action. 📺

Homelessness and encampments – Halifax’s response

Halifax, on Canada’s east coast, is the financial and business capital of its region. It’s also one of the fastest growing areas in the country. The city grew by more than 20,000 people in 2022, driven by immigration and by those coming from other cities across Canada, drawn to Halifax by the slower pace and proximity to the ocean. As a result, real estate and rent prices have increased significantly. The rental vacancy rate is 1% and many higher-end apartments and homes are being built.

Halifax’s population of unhoused people doubled in a year (the latest by-name list counts around 800 people) and one of the biggest issues, like many other places across Canada, has been an increase in encampments. These have been setting up in established, residential neighbourhoods and the council has been receiving a growing number of complaints.

My conversation with Jessica Bradley, senior policy advisor to Halifax Mayor Mike Savage, was like déjà vu.

“Working for city government can be difficult. It’s a really challenging and emotionally charged topic to discuss. There are the issues of balancing the needs and rights of the unhoused, and the needs and rights of people who live around there,” Jessica shared.

In 2019, after mounting pressure, Council undertook a forced eviction at a downtown location in the middle of the business district. They saw a large amount of backlash from the public.

“We learned a lot of lessons from that,” Jessica said. Soon after, another encampment, within a park in a residential area, made headlines.

Realising police involvement did not work, the council did not take action on the encampment. However, the park reached a point where there were significant public health and safety concerns.

Council and housing service providers and support workers agreed that keeping the encampment going was not an option. The council ended up working with services and support workers to close the encampment without conflict, not asking people to move unless offered an alternative.

“In Halifax, the city has no mandate for housing. That is the responsibility of the state (province), but cities have the problem and want to be an active partner in finding solutions,” Jessica noted.

“It’s a struggle. You can sometimes feel powerless as a city. You want to do more but our mandate is



IMAGE: NEWCASTLE

Victoria Park
Halifax

parks, roads, garbage collection. We have to find creative ways to respond.”

The city has diverted budget and found funds (CAD \$5 million) to build emergency housing in the form of 65 modular units.

But if it is to keep going, the city will need to do some soul searching and find more budget. With limited funds, this will mean deciding whether to cut spending in other areas.

The City of Halifax has been looking at what else it can do to influence housing stock. Here are some of the interim actions council has taken.

- The council recently approved shared housing models (rooming house style) that had not been permitted in the city previously. They also opened-up the option for homeowners to build backyard suites in any zoning area.

- Inclusionary zoning – the council is putting through a density bonus bylaw to set guidelines and provide incentives to investors to increase density

- Despite a lot of lobbying against, the council is looking into regulating short term rentals, like Airbnb

- The appointment of a ‘street navigator’ to visit

“In Halifax, the city has no mandate for housing. That is the responsibility of the state (province), but cities have the problem and want to be an active partner in finding solutions.”

JESSICA BRADLEY, CITY OF HALIFAX

encampments and connect folks to social services (this is often difficult because there are virtually no social housing options to meet demand)

- The hiring of a Director of Housing and Homelessness, responsible for leading the city’s response to homelessness and encampments, and creating an official city strategy for addressing homelessness

- Spending money on basic supplies for people sleeping rough (sleeping bags, tents, food etc.)

- Launching a lived experience committee, which is more like a series of one-on-one conversations with unhoused individuals, conducted by trained navigators to help inform the city’s strategy on homelessness

- Sanctioning five tenting locations where the city provides toilets, garbage collection, water, and storage bins for personal belongings. ☺



SCAN QR CODE WITH YOUR PHONE
See: [Helping address homelessness](#) in Halifax.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Local Government may not have the money, the mandate or the recognition, but it certainly has an important role to play in preventing and responding to homelessness in all its forms. This may be a difficult role to assume because councils serve wide and diverse communities and can often find themselves torn between conflicting needs and responsibilities. There are, however, proven ways to bridge these gaps.

This report has suggested a number of practical recommendations for council action through the guidelines listed in the section above. There is also more that all partners – Commonwealth and State governments, the service sector, business and community – can do to help bring local government to the table and reach its potential in responding to homelessness. These form my final recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

1 Make homelessness everyone's business.

Utilise Local Government's ability to connect across sectors and bring together a community, recognising that not one group or person can solve a complex problem like homelessness. Rather, a collective approach will yield better results. This also recognises that there are diverse views about homelessness, and negotiation may be required to find acceptable ways to work together.

2 Focus on homelessness beyond rough sleeping.

While street homelessness is the most visible and vulnerable experience of homelessness and obviously requires action, local government is equipped to respond to a broader experience of homelessness. Extending how homelessness is viewed – focusing also on people who live in cars, couch surf, stay in places of uncertain tenure, including rooming houses and caravan parks, and live in overcrowded

conditions – expands the scope of intervention by local government and all its partners.

3 Recognise what you can do to prevent homelessness.

Through its structure and close connections to community, Local Government can play a much wider role in homelessness prevention. Don't just talk about prevention, either. Take time to identify what factors will most likely lead to homelessness in your community and use that to build your knowledge and actions. Identify the customer service points – in your council and in the community – where connection with people at risk of homelessness might take place and do everything you can to link with them before they hit crisis point.

4 Educate and change the narrative. Building understanding and empathy will go a long way. Local Government is in a good position to get the story straight on homelessness, its origins and how it impacts individuals, families and the broader community. Use your close connection to the community to educate people on the causes and impacts of homelessness on individuals and the community at-large.

5 Take your seat at the table. Lobby Commonwealth and State Governments to recognise Local Government's unique offering in responding to and ending homelessness. Future national and state level homelessness plans should include local government as a key partner. To back this up, funds need to be made available to local councils to coordinate data collection, prevention and collaboration efforts. This will overcome financial barriers and allow Local Government the opportunity to fulfil this important and necessary role.



Homelessness mural in Manchester.

GUIDELINES FOR COUNCIL ACTION

LEAD THE NARRATIVE AND DRIVE COLLABORATION

1 Nurture community alliances: As a council, carefully consider your role in local collaborations. If the opportunity arises, step back and let the community lead.

2 Embrace lived experiences: Look to people with a lived experience of homelessness to partner in and inform your work. They will bring a perspective and an ability to connect that you may not be able to tap into in other ways.

3 Involve all parts of government: Consider which government partners will be most important to you in addressing the social, economic, environmental and political aspects of homelessness locally, and bring those people together.

4 Collaborate to address welfare, safety and amenity: Establish coordinated partnership responses with agreed goals and well-defined roles and responsibilities.

5 Communicate and educate for better outcomes: Councils have the connections and the means to change perceptions of homelessness. Make the time to tell the story.



KNOW YOUR LOCAL HOMELESSNESS SITUATION

1 Collect local data: Get to know your local homelessness situation. Collect data in your area and use that to make decisions about what to do next.

2 Listen to your community: Take time to listen and learn from your community. Know what they are doing and build your approach with them.

3 Establish a shared definition of homelessness: Work with your partners and agree on how you jointly define homelessness. This will help align your work.

Shopfront at Simon Community Glasgow



GUIDELINES FOR COUNCIL ACTION



ORGANISE YOUR APPROACH AND YOUR WORKFORCE

- 1 Build a collaborative strategy: Develop a homelessness strategy, but make sure it is not just yours. A genuine approach to collaboration will see better outcomes for the whole community.
- 2 Lead and influence good giving: Be prepared to have tough conversations with your community about on-street giving. Conversations about alternative ways to help can redirect goodwill and see better outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.
- 3 Structure your teams for success: Working in homelessness is hard. Support your staff by establishing a clear understanding of your goals and shared values.
- 4 Involve mayors and senior management: Equip your mayor and councillors with knowledge and information. Involve them in your homelessness efforts to tell your local story and build support for your efforts.
- 5 Rethink and realign budgets: Tight budgets may become the fundamental barrier to councils taking action on homelessness. Look for funding opportunities internally and assign funds where you can. Some lobbying of State and Commonwealth governments to increase their funding might help too.

Mariel Sass, Library Social Worker, Baltimore



ACT TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS

- 1 Do what you can to influence housing supply: Use planning powers to control and direct influence over your housing supply. Ensure collaboration between council planners and homelessness service staff to align efforts and create more opportunities.
- 2 Refocus prevention: Make the most of the community connection points that councils hold and build organisation-wide responsibility for early interventions that prevent homelessness.
- 3 Bring in your libraries - and other customer service staff: Recognise the value of your colleagues who work with your community but are not the homelessness 'experts'. With the right training and support they can help identify and respond to homelessness.
- 4 Know what you can offer in crisis response: Local Government is in a good position to convene on-the-ground crisis response. Know where you can add value and take an informed, human rights approach that considers the needs of all members of your community.

ITINERARY

UNITED KINGDOM

- Greater Manchester 26-29 September
- Newcastle 3 October
- Glasgow 4-6 October
- Leicester 10 October
- London 12-20 October

UNITED STATES

- New York 24-28 October
- Baltimore 31 October - 1 November
- Washington DC 9-15 November
- San Francisco 17-22 November

CANADA

Toronto 2-5 November
Attended the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Annual Conference. Presented on my work and held meetings with representatives from:
- Toronto
- Halifax
- Montreal
- Edmonton



FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS

| DATE | LOCATION | ORGANISATION | INTERVIEWEE | KEYPOINTS | REFERENCES |
|-------|---------------------|---|---|--|--|
| 26/9 | Rochdale | Rochdale City Council | Stephen Broughton | Service coordination, service commissioning | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing Futures• Fulfilling Lives |
| | Rochdale | Sanctuary Trust | Tony McManus, Changing Futures Rob Rowe, Rough Sleeper Initiative | Service coordination, outreach | |
| 12/10 | Rochdale | Rochdale City Council | Sean Beech, Housing Project Officer (interviewed via Zoom 12/10/22) | Changing Futures | |
| 12/10 | Rochdale | The Bond Board | Clare Grey, MEAM Team Leader (interviewed via Zoom 12/10/22) | Changing Futures | |
| 27/9 | Manchester | Manchester City Council (outreach team) | Robyn Bailey, outreach worker Rahat Aslam, outreach worker Amber, outreach worker | Outreach | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Bed Every Night• Street Engagement Hub• Mustard Tree |
| | Manchester | Manchester City Council (management) | Nicola Rea, Strategic Lead for Homelessness Shafaq Tariq, Program Manager Homelessness Gareth Clarke, Service Manager Jane Davis, Commissioning Manager | Strategy, collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homelessness Strategy• Manchester Homelessness Charter• Manchester Homelessness Partnership• Real Change Manchester |
| 28/9 | Wigan | Wigan Council | David Gray, Crisis Intervention and Prevention Manager Joanne Casson, Service manager | Whole of council and community response | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wigan Deal• Article: Rekindling hope: the story of the Wigan Deal• A citizen-led approach to health and care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal |
| 28/9 | Wigan | Queens Hall Action on Poverty (the Brick) Wigan | Keely Dalfen, Director | | |
| 28/9 | Salford | Salford Council | Rachel Connelly, Head of Supported Housing | Working with council | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Salford Council – housing and homelessness |
| 29/9 | Manchester | Greater Manchester Combined Authority | Molly Bishop, Strategic Lead for Homelessness | Cross-council collaboration, Legislative Theatre | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater Manchester Combined Authority• Legislative theatre- Manchester |
| 3/10 | Newcastle Upon Tyne | Newcastle City Council | Neil Munslow MBE, Service Manager Active Inclusion James Stewart, Program lead for Active Inclusion Peter Scott, Team Leader Jemma Shield, Your Homes Newcastle Stephen Chanse, Team Leader, Cherry Tree housing | Prevention | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• World habitat award• Active Newcastle 2021-22 briefing note• Active Inclusion Newcastle website resources• How Newcastle is leading the way |
| 4/10 | Glasgow | Glasgow | Scotland’s annual homelessness conference – Home for 10 | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Home for 10 Conference Journal |
| 5/10 | Glasgow | Simon Community Scotland | Jeanann Webster, Head of Learning and Development | Community hubs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Video: The Access Hub – a virtual tour• Our support and access hub (web) |
| 5/10 | Glasgow | Heriot-Watt University | Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Professor of housing and social policy | Prevention | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homelessness Reduction Act 2017• Fitzpatrick, Mackie and Wood’s five stage typology of homelessness prevention |
| 5/10 | Glasgow | Glasgow Alliance to end homelessness | Kara Conner, Head of Operations | Alliancing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glasgow Alliance to End Homelessness |
| 6/10 | Glasgow | Homelessness Network Scotland | Maggie Brujnes, CEO Ginny Cooper, Improvement lead | Alliancing, partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• LHAlliances- about us |
| 6/10 | Glasgow | Glasgow Public Library | Katrina Brodin, Programme Manager (Reader Development & Literacy) Sarah Summers, Librarian | Community support through libraries | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Glasgow libraries health and wellbeing |

| | | | | | |
|-------|-----------|--|---|---|---|
| 10/10 | Leicester | World Habitat | David Ireland, CEO World Habitat Ella Hancock, Programme Manager, homelessness | Politics, collaboration, world best practice | • World Habitat Awards |
| 10/10 | Leicester | Leicester’s Homelessness Charter | Rebecca Pawley, Project Coordinator | Community collaboration | • Charter’s website |
| 12/10 | London | Mayday Trust | Robert White, Director of Change (formally) | Pressures on local government workers | • Article – I tried and failed to solve homelessness in Westminster |
| 13/10 | London | Westminster Homelessness Partnership | Dom Williamson, Consultant | Role of councils, politics, strategy | • Westminster Homelessness Partnership |
| 18/10 | London | City of Westminster | James Tompsett, Homelessness Commissioner | Inner city rough sleeping response | • City of Westminster – Homelessness |
| 18/10 | | Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea | Sandy McDougall, Housing Solutions Team Manager | Community engagement | • RBKC – Help with homelessness |
| 18/10 | London | Greater London Authority | David Eastwood MBE, Rough Sleeping Lead | Inter-council collaboration | • Homelessness – Greater London Authority |
| 19/10 | London | Lambeth Council | Paul Davis, Head of Commissioning – Supported Housing | Outreach roles, strategy | • Homelessness – Lambeth Council |
| 20/10 | London | Haringey Council | Maddie Watkins, Strategic Lead for Single Homelessness and Vulnerable Adults | Co-production; legislative theatre, budgeting | • Legislative Theatre • Co-creating the Rough Sleeping Strategy in Haringey through Legislative Theatre |
| 20/10 | London | Crisis UK | Francesca Albanese, Head of Research and Evaluation | Role and pressures on local government | • Crisis UK – About homelessness • Public Attitudes towards homelessness |
| 24/10 | New York | UN ANIMA International | Jean Quinn, Executive Director | UN resolution on homelessness, definitions | • UN resolution on homelessness • About the UN Working Group |
| 24/10 | New York | Community Solutions | Erin Healy, State Strategy Lead, Built for Zero KO Campbell, Senior Strategy Lead Built for Zero | Data, definitions | • Built for Zero |
| 25/10 | New York | Bloomberg Associates | Linda Gibbs, Principal Tamiru Mammo, Consultant | Role of mayors, collaboration | • Menino Survey of Mayors • Book- how ten global cities take on homelessness |
| 25/10 | New York | Australian Mission to the UN | The Hon Mitch Fifield, Ambassador | UN resolution on homelessness | |
| 26/10 | New York | New York Public Library | Anita Favretto, Associate Director, Outreach & Adult Programming | Social work in libraries | |
| 27/10 | New York | New York Department of Homeless Services | Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner Joslyn Carter, Administrator Erin Dean, Chief of Staff, Shane Cox, Assistant Commissioner Partnership, Capacity Building and Strategy | Collaboration, service delivery, working with a mayor, Safe Haven shelter | • NYC Homebase – homelessness prevention • Safe havens (shelter) |
| 28/10 | New York | Bowery Residents Committee (BRC) | Muzzy Rosenblatt, CEO and PresidJoent | Outreach, housing | • BRC- website Street outreach with business (video) |
| 31/10 | Baltimore | Enoch Pratt Public Library | Marial Sass, Library Social Worker | Social work in libraries | • Social worker in the Library program |
| 1/11 | Baltimore | Enoch Pratt Public Library | Donna Bruce, Peer Supervisor | Lived experience workers | • About Peer Recovery program • Maryland Addiction and Behavioral-health Professionals Certification Board |

| | | | | | |
|---------|---------------|---|---|---|--|
| 2/11 | Toronto | Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference 2022 | Presented at Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference – Session: Leading System Change through Governance Models to End Homelessness | | |
| 3/11 | Halifax | Halifax Regional Council | Jessica Bradley, Special Advisor to Mayor Mike Savage (at CAEH conference) | Council responses to encampments | • Helping address homelessness in Halifax |
| 4/11 | Edmonton | City of Edmonton | Don Iveson, Former Mayor now Chair of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness (at CAEH conference) | Politics of homelessness | |
| 4/11 | Toronto | Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness | Tim Richter, President and CEO (at CAEH conference) | Encampments, politics | • CAEH – homepage • The National Protocol for Homelessness Encampments in Canada |
| 4/11 | Montreal | City of Montreal | Serge Lareault, Commissioner for Homelessness Josefina Blanco, Councillor | Local government role and positions | • Q&A with Serge Lareault, Montreal’s new homeless advocate |
| 5/11 | Toronto | City of Toronto, | Steph Malcher, Manager Coordinated Access | Working with services, internal coordination | • Homeless help – City of Toronto |
| 8/12 | Toronto | Org Code Consulting | Iain DeJong, President and CEO (interviewed via Zoom 8/12/22) | Local government role, encampments | • Org Code Consulting |
| 9/11 | Washington DC | Martin Luther King Public Library | Jean Badalamenti, Manager Health and Human Services | Library social work | • DC Public Library’s Peer Navigator Program |
| 10/11 | Washington DC | Arlington County | Triina Van, Homeless Services Coordinator | Role of local government in addressing homelessness | • Arlington County homelessness webpage |
| 14/11 | Washington DC | Montgomery County | Amanda Harris, Chief of Services to end and prevent homelessness Ilana Branda, Deputy Chief of Services Rozina Adhanom, Continuum of Care Coordinator Kim Ball, Administrator of homeless services to adults Mary Gies, Deputy Chief of Staff to Councilmember Andrew Friedson Dan Lane, Department community service officer, City of Gaithersburg Police | Working with community, business, prevention | • Montgomery County homelessness webpage • Washington Post: Annual homeless count shows slight drop, fewest unhoused since 2001 |
| 15/11 | Washington DC | Department of Human Services | Rachel Pierre, Family Services Administration Administrator | Government collaboration, strategy | • Homeward DC |
| 15/11 | Washington DC | National Alliance to End Homelessness | Jerry Jones, National Field Director | Encampments, point in time counts | • NAEH Blog: What can (and can’t) local government do to address homelessness? |
| 9/12 | Washington DC | DC Interagency Council on Homelessness | Theresa Silla, Executive Director Donna Harris, Director of Communications (Interviewed via Zoom on 9/12/22) | Partnerships, strategy | • Interagency Council on Homelessness |
| 31/1/23 | Washington DC | US Interagency Council on Homelessness | Jeff Olivet, Executive Director (Interviewed via Zoom on 31/1/23) | Partnerships, strategy, prevention | • All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness USICH webpage |
| 17/11 | San Francisco | San Francisco Chronicle | Kevin Fagan, Reporter | Housing and NIMBY-ism | • Shame of the city – five part series. First story – Homeless Island |
| 17/11 | San Francisco | Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing | Cynthia Nagendra, Deputy Director Kaitlyn Motley, Strategy and Planning Manager | Communications, strategy | • SF Homelessness Response System (video) |
| 17/11 | San Francisco | Office of the Mayor of San Francisco | Amy Sawyer, Policy Advisor | Communications, strategy | |
| 21/11 | San Francisco | Episcopal Community Services | Beth Stokes, CEO | Communications/ PR, NIMBY-ism | • ECS Website |

| | | | | | |
|-------|---------------|--|--|---|--|
| 21/11 | San Francisco | San Francisco Department of Emergency Management | Sam Dodge, Director Healthy Streets Operations Centre | Collaboration, community safety and amenity | • Healthy Streets Operations Centre • Tenderloin Emergency Initiative Strategic Plan and Operations Guide • Video: Tenderloin Emergency Initiative – Connecting People to Services |
| 22/11 | San Francisco | San Francisco Public Library | Leah Esguerra, Library Social Worker Jen, Health and Safety Associate Sid, Health and Safety Associate Ida, Health and Safety Associate | Library social work | • Article: Library social worker helps homeless seeking quiet refuge |
| 22/11 | San Francisco | Urban Alchemy | Jeff Kositsky, Chief Growth Officer Bayron Wilson, Director of Operations Lena Miller, CEO | Community safety and amenity | • Urban Alchemy website • Article – San Francisco Chronicle |

Several people in Australia and overseas assisted me before I travelled, sharing background information, participating in interviews and providing introductions. Because of location and sometimes timing, there were some who I never got to meet in-person. I list them here to recognise the knowledge they provided.

| LOCATION | ORGANISATION | CONTACT |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Chicago | Institute of Global Homelessness | Lydia Stazen, Director |
| New York | Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) | Gary P. Jenkins, Commissioner |
| Charlotte, North Carolina | University of North Carolina | Beth Wahler, Professor and Director, School of Social Sciences |
| Greensboro, North Carolina | University of North Carolina | Noah Lenstra, Associate Professor |
| Indiana | Indiana University | Mary Provence, PhD Candidate |
| Cincinnati | University of Illinois | Sarah Johnson, Adjunct Lecturer |
| Seattle | Community Solutions | Rian Watts, Strategy Lead International and Large Scale Change Work |
| Washington DC | National Alliance to End Homelessness | Joy Moses, Vice President of Research and Evidence |
| Glasgow | Homeless Network Scotland | David Kidd, Improvement Leader |
| Glasgow | Simon Community Scotland | Lorraine McGrath, Chief Executive Officer |
| London | London Councils | Michelle Binfield, Rough Sleeping Program Director |
| London | Linda Hutchinson Consulting | Linda Hutchinson, Principal |
| Somerset | Somerset County Council Libraries | Darren Smart, Service Manager Libraries Development |
| Helsinki | City of Helsinki | Pia Pulkkinen, Director of Substance Abuse Services Reeta Aurora Hakolahti, Outreach Services |
| Helsinki | Y Foundation | Juha Kahila, Head of International Affairs |

IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION

The reason I applied for a Churchill Fellowship was because, there was very little practical information available about the role my team and I could play as homelessness workers in Local Government. While we worked with many partners (without a mandate or budget,) we often had to fight hard, in our workplace and outside, to influence decisions and demonstrate how we could make a difference.

The opportunity to undertake a Churchill Fellowship allowed me access to more than 100 local government workers, partner organisations and allies. What I learned was that, while our circumstances may be different, our situation is uncannily similar. We work hard on wicked problems, feel many of the same pressures, and maintain hope in systems and people so that we can end the injustices of homelessness.

I am inspired and hopeful. Having met so many accomplished people doing so much in the UK, US, Canada and in Australia, I hope I can do my small part to highlight the things that work and the ways to connect this community.

To this end, I have written my report as a practical guide – the document I would have liked to access in 2016, when rough sleeping became an issue in Melbourne – with ideas, practical examples and stories. I would like every other council in Australia to have this at-hand when they need it.

Here is my plan regarding how I intend to disseminate my work and make a difference.

Speaking: Tell my stories. Talk to as many people as I can about what I saw, who I met and what I learned.

- **Conferences** – I have spoken at two already: the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness Conference in Toronto, 2-5 November 2022, and Charles Sturt University’s Library Social Work Symposium, 2 December 2022.

I will look for more opportunities to present. Upcoming opportunities in 2023 include events hosted by The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), Council of Capital City Lord Mayors (CCCLM), Homelessness NSW and the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness. I hope I will also have the opportunity to connect directly with Local Government workers through other state specific local government groups.

- **Meetings** – I am exploring opportunities to attend local government and service sector meetings as they become available, to talk about my experiences and learnings.

Connecting: Find opportunities to bring people together, around Australia and internationally.

- **Communities of practice** – I realise there are many local government workers who would like

to connect with colleagues and learn about their homelessness responses, but don’t know how. A number of organisations are doing great work to bring cities and regional locations together, sharing practice and knowledge. These include the Institute of Global Homelessness, Bloomberg Partners, Community Solutions and World Habitat. Sometimes this requires signing up to a prescribed way of working, meeting certain criteria, or finding funding, which might not be accessible to everyone. I would like to find ways where workers in any council, big or small, city or regional, can connect and learn.

Additionally, I will explore how Australian municipalities might participate further internationally and look at the appetite for a local community of practice focused specifically on local government responses to homelessness.

- **Make introductions** – I will proactively introduce people and help them foster their own connections wherever I can.

Writing: Publish on the topic as a way of connecting across Australia and keeping what I have learned up to date.

- **Articles** – Prior to leaving Australia, I published an article – All responsibility, little power: what can local government do to end homelessness? – on the Cities People Love website. Along the way it helped me tell my story and benchmark my insights. I hope to keep writing and publishing on the topic. If possible, I would aim for an academic article as well as other, more accessible pieces.

- **Blog** – I wrote a blog (Local Government and Homelessness) while I undertook my Fellowship and intend to keep posting, utilising LinkedIn as a way to publicise.

- **Website** – In the longer term I would like to establish a website as a portal for keeping my research up to date.

Advocating: Contribute to efforts underway to get local government a seat at the national and state tables.

- **National housing and homelessness plan** – building on my key recommendation that Local Government be recognised and funded for what it can do to address and end homelessness, I will be looking for opportunities where I can lend a voice to the conversation. I will share my report with the Commonwealth and State governments, as well as Councils across Australia, inviting conversations about what I have learned and why I am convinced that recognising, involving and funding local government will make a difference.

For my mum, Paddy.

Everybody's Business

What local government can do to end homelessness

By Leanne Mitchell

2019 Jack Brockhoff Foundation Churchill Fellowship to investigate how councils can respond to rough sleeping while balancing responsibilities to the wider community.

Thank you!



**Winston
Churchill Trust**
Learn globally, inspire locally.