

# ENDING HOMELESSNESS

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Mercy Social Justice – Mercy College

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# Overview of presentation

- Mercy Foundation background/history/2008
- The Foundation's interest in homelessness & link to Catherine McAuley.
- Focus is on 'chronic' homelessness (there are other types of homelessness I won't be talking about).
- Some important definitions.
- Why being 'well meant' is not good enough: This is about social justice.
- Can we end homelessness? Some of the things that we know work eg. PSH, VI.



# The Mercy Foundation

- Philanthropic Foundation established by the North Sydney Sisters of Mercy in 1990.
- Now - focus on homelessness: more specifically *ending homelessness*.
- Special interest in women who are homeless.
- We advocate, educate, develop projects through partnerships (eg. Common Ground) and make grants.
- We are not a direct service provider.

# Focus on homelessness

- Became CEO Mercy Foundation in 2008.
- Introduce Sue Mowbray – Business Manager since 2009.
- Mercy Foundation has 2 grants programs – explain.
- We advocate around policy and programs eg. Expert panel on GHSH reform.
- Home in a Box – which Sue will be talking about.
- Partnership projects – development of new housing options.
- Forums and education on homelessness and working with formerly homeless people.

# First – a few important definitions

- Types of homelessness:
  - Primary
  - Secondary
  - Tertiary
- Chronic, episodic, short term, brief.
- Majority – brief episode of homelessness.
- 10 – 15% chronically homeless (estimate only).
- We know (ABS 2012) that just 6% of total homeless are 'rough sleepers'. This has reduced since 2006.
- Focus of this presentation – Chronic Homelessness.

*(Chamberlain & McKenzie definition )*

# Another way to think about homelessness

- Taken from Kraybill – 3 Homes.
- Useful way to consider homelessness, because it has meaning for everyone – not just people who are currently homeless. We can all relate to it.
- It is explained on the next 3 slides – keep these ideas in your mind as we travel through this presentation.

- **The First Home:** This is 'the self'. The characteristics of this home are physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual in nature. This home needs to be nurtured, rested, nourished and emotionally supported.



- **The Second home:** might cover any of the descriptions provided under the primary, secondary and tertiary definitions of homelessness. It is the place where we live, and it refers not only to the physical structure but to the living environment within which it is located. This home is where we sleep, where we begin and end every day, where we store our belongings, it may be where we socialise and interact with others.

- **The Third home:** is the larger community within which our first and second homes are located. It provides context to the lives that are lived within it and how that is realised at an individual level. Here the connectivity between individuals, multiple communities, the residential, business and visitors all meet in the same place. The quality of that home is defined by the relationships of all groups within it. (from City of Sydney, Homelessness Strategy 2007-2012).

# Chronic homelessness

- 'Chronic homelessness' – an experience of homelessness can happen to a lot of people (crisis/brief etc).
- Chronic homelessness is a bit different. 6 months or longer; or multiple episodes of 12 months or longer.
- Most commonly affects people with: dual diagnosis; mental illness; drug/alcohol dependence; history of trauma; cognitive problems. However.....all have poverty in common.
- Chronic homelessness is NEVER a choice (although people can adapt to it).



- People who are long term homeless and who have multiple needs are often high users of acute mental health care, emergency departments, temporary accommodation, police and court involvement and other crisis services.
- Evidence that service use reduces once people are in stable housing and have adequate support.
- Some evidence it may cost less (and definitely more socially just).



# Three good reasons why we should end chronic homelessness

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- COST
- SOCIAL JUSTICE
- WE CAN (RESULTS)

*(Equate with abolitionist arguments of the 1800s)*

# Social justice (or the moral argument)

- A very significant proportion of the chronically homeless population have one or more of the following conditions:
  - Mental illness
  - Substance dependence
  - Dual diagnosis
  - History of trauma and PTSD
  - Brain injury; cognitive problems; behavioural disturbances
  - Literacy problems
  - POVERTY

# Evidence of results (Solutions)

- Housing ends homelessness. Most people just need affordable, appropriate housing (75-85% do not experience chronic homelessness).
- People who experience chronic homelessness with ongoing health and support needs will usually need ongoing support attached to permanent affordable, appropriate housing.



# Evidence for programs that end chronic homelessness

- Permanent Supportive Housing (eg. Pathways to Housing; Common Ground; HASI – good examples).
- Common Ground – Camperdown & MF involvement.
- Housing First – no pre-requisites.
- MF actively involved in ACGA and Sydney CG; Project 40; Platform 70.

# ***We've removed the guesswork about people who are chronically homeless***

- For too long Australia has known very little about the people who are chronically homeless & currently sleep on our streets.
- How can we solve problem we know little about?
- Vulnerability Index – validated tool (based on the work of Dr Jim O'Connell).
- Direct needs assessment with people on the street.
- With key aim to ensure that the most vulnerable people are followed up as a matter of urgency – for housing and ongoing support.

# Background (research) to VI project

- VI project – November 2010
- Co-ordinated by Mercy Foundation. Way2Home service provider partner.
- Has now also been done in Brisbane, Melbourne, Hobart ,Western Sydney and Perth (over 1600 people surveyed).
- Uses validated instrument based on the research of Dr Jim O'Connell and Dr Stephen Hwang
- Identifies the most vulnerable and at risk people in order to identify and offer housing and support asap. About a third now in housing.



Sydney, 1,2,3 November  
2010

# Tenant Profile (USA) - Before



# Tenant Profile (USA) - After



# Further information

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