

**Submission
No 8**

INQUIRY INTO THE PROTOCOL FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE IN PUBLIC PLACES

Organisation: Orange Sky Australia

Date Received: 26 February 2020

Wednesday, 26 February 2020

The Chair,
Committee on Community Services,
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000.

Dear Wendy Lindsay,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a response to the call for submissions to the 'Inquiry into the Protocol for Homeless People in Public Places'. As an organisation providing services to vulnerable people and people experiencing homelessness in New South Wales we welcome the opportunity to contribute our observations and experience in the sector to the examination of how the Protocol is working in practice and the opportunities available to strengthen the current approach.

Who is Orange Sky?

Orange Sky's (OS) mission is to *positively connect communities* through the supply to our friends in need of free laundry, showers and conversation. There are 116,000 people in Australia experiencing homelessness and the OS community comprising over 2000 volunteers operate over 220 shifts from 29 vehicles in 22 cities every week around Australia providing a safe, positive and supportive platform for everyday Australian's to connect with each other. Since commencing services in 2014, OS have washed over 1,000,000 kilos of washing, provided 9000 warm showers, and most importantly, over 200,000 hours of genuine and non- judgemental conversation.

Homelessness is not a label, but rather, a state of being

At OS we are careful not to label people as 'homeless'. We consider people to be 'experiencing a state of homeless' that is not finite and does not carry on as a label attached to them in perpetuity. We refer to people experiencing homelessness as 'friends', 'friends on the street' or 'friends in need'. We would encourage similar language to be adopted in the Protocol and in practice as it humanises more so

the actual experience of the person in question as opposed to the term homeless, which often attaches to the person as a label.

Suggested areas for consideration

The Protocol tends to make the reader feel like the document is designed to distance officials and service providers from friends rather than bridge the divide. For example, Section 2 refers to information exchange. This can be described as a clinical term and one which does not resonate with friends. What does it actually mean? Is the Protocol suggesting the offering of support or advice, or collecting information by asking if the person is experiencing homelessness? It is difficult to discern clearly the value information exchange provides each party. People experiencing homelessness often don't seek support, so approaching it as a 'genuine, non-judgemental' connection as opposed to 'information exchange' may result in the positive outcome that is desired. Perhaps, the Protocol could be redeveloped to better facilitate a 'connection' as opposed to 'exchange'.

In Section 2, the Protocol refers to 'high risk areas'. It would be good to understand what is being defined as high risk. For example, Is Martin Place high risk (i.e. we have had significant incidents occur there and friends moved from this location)? We would like to better understand the definition of high risk.

In Section 2.1, we would suggest expanding the definition of homelessness. For example, we also class overcrowded accommodation and some forms of couch surfing as experiencing homelessness.

In Section 4, we would suggest the inclusion of further complex needs. For example, people experiencing domestic violence.

In Section 6.1, when referring friends to the Homeless Persons Information Centre, we would suggest adding information to the effect that it is a free call number and its hours of operations. Perhaps, identifying if another similar service is available outside operation times. Also, the Homeless Persons Information centre isn't suitable for people under 16. Is there another number suitable for young people? In addition, you could include information regarding use of an online, anytime service such as Ask Izzy (askizzy.org.au). Ask Izzy is used by OS team members/volunteers to

provide information to friends regarding homelessness services. It is free to use on the Telstra and Optus networks requiring no phone credit to access.

In conclusion

At the end of the day, as indicated in the Protocol, people are people and are entitled to be in public spaces, carry belongings and participating in activities. Judgement, in some cases not applied appropriately or in a manner that is not contextually relevant, through specific Protocols further stigmatise and increase challenges for people experiencing homelessness. Ensuring appropriate language is used to humanise people experiencing something that is not permanent is as important as the document this language is used in itself.

Thank you for accepting our submission and please don't hesitate in contacting Mike Duggan, Orange Sky Chief Operating Officer, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] [REDACTED] with any questions.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

Michael Duggan,
Chief Operating Officer
Orange Sky Australia