

Submission
No 18

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

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Member for Hornsby



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Submission to the 'Inquiry into homelessness and low-cost rental accommodation'
being undertaken by the Standing Committee on Social Issues of the Legislative Council,
NSW State Parliament

From: Judy Hopwood MP
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To: The Hon Ian West MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues (Legislative Council)
NSW Parliament
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Chair

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

As the local Member of Parliament for the Seat of Hornsby I have an as yet undetermined number of homeless people – that could total hundreds – who have a wide age range and a variety of associated issues, for example, mental illness, social exclusion, unemployment with a variety of general health problems. The reason the number remains unclear is that there has been no concerted effort to count them.

A series of crisis situations mid-2008 resulted in a crisis meeting and the formation of the Hornsby Homelessness Task Force (largely chaired and directed by me) that has met on four subsequent occasions. It became obvious that the homeless had been totally invisible to the Department of Housing until this point in time despite living in caves and bush camps for decades. The Task Force consists of a group of concerned participants including: St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Department of Housing representatives, local Hornsby Kuring-gai Youth Network, Hornsby Shire Council representative, Police Force, community group 'The Dish' (feeds the homeless weekly behind Hornsby Pool) and additional members of the community, for example, church members/social justice interests, youth workers and managers of organisations that provide health care in the community.

I wish to briefly address two of the of the terms of Reference related to the Inquiry as follows:

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1. (b) methods of fast tracking the capacity of providers to deliver low-cost rental accommodation

The requirement to accurately (as far as possible) map the homelessness issue seems a logical way in which to assess the extent of the problem and a basis upon which to meet needs. The Hornsby Electorate (indeed, the Council area) urgently requires a mapping exercise to gather evidence.

An examination of the Project 'Common Ground' as it works in the United States of America, Adelaide and its conceptual application in Melbourne will detail an effective way in which to provide low-cost accommodation that could be provided quickly. I am not aware that the NSW Government has funded the Project in New South Wales despite a verbal commitment to the Project.

1. (e) strategies to avoid concentrations of disadvantage and grow cohesive communities.

The formation of partnerships in local communities that have effective communication both internally and with adjacent communities would seek to grow cohesive communities and provide accommodation and service options that could reduce concentrations of disadvantage. In the Parramatta area the Parramatta Mission works with a cooperative of organisations (or stakeholders) including Parramatta City Council, Department of Housing, Department of Health; this cooperative assesses problems and works together on solutions. There are visible successes related to this type of work arrangement, a phenomenon not seen in the Hornsby Electorate. The replication of the ability of all necessary stakeholders, including Hornsby Shire Council, I believe would go a long way to arrive at service provision and opportunities to reduce disadvantage through provision of meals and accommodation. Presently, Hornsby Shire Council has no mention of a large demographic (the homeless) in its Social Plan. The inclusion of accurate reflections of local communities and a commitment by individual organisations to work cohesively with the marginalised community described is absolutely essential for any success in solving homelessness issues. There should be a compulsion by government to ensure local councils address the needs of all their residents, by first accurately reflecting the types of people who live in the Council areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the above views.

Yours sincerely

Judy Hopwood MP
Member for Hornsby