

Submission
No 46

INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AND LOW-COST RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

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The Director
NSW Legislative Council's
Standing Committee on Social issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

25/3/09

Dear Sir/Madam

I write to submit local concerns on homelessness and low-cost rental accommodation.

Highlands Community Centres Inc (HCC) is funded by the Department of Community Services under a GSGP Grant.

Our service offers information and referrals, emergency relief, community development, youth services, no interest loans, tax help and general crisis assistance and advocacy to the citizens of the Wingecarribee Shire. We are open each day, and are accessible to people in need without a waiting period. Last year we assisted 5,113 of our community members with major and minor help.

The Wingecarribee Shire covers 2,700 square kilometers and is made up of 3 major towns, Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale and 14 smaller villages. The population is 43,000 and for some reason is seen as an affluent area, in fact the average and medium weekly individual income was \$462.00 (2006 Census) which aligns with NSW. Social Housing equates to aprox 618 dwellings which represents 2.4% and is well below the NSW average of 5%

Over the past 8 months we have noticed a steep climb in rents for the very limited private rental accommodation available. Many of our clients are paying up to 50% of their income on rent with some paying more. For the very low paid Newstart and Youth Allowance Centrelink recipients private rental, on their own, is out of reach. As the Department of Housing (DOH) do not have a presence within our Shire, HCC has signed a MOU with DOH Campbelltown to assist with and fax DOH forms for Wingecarribee clients requesting Bond Assistance, Rent Arrears and Temporary Accommodation so they do not have to travel 140 Klm to Campbelltown.

The DOH can provide Temporary Accommodation to homeless people in a local motel, if nothing else is available, for up to 26 days. The recipient is expected to look for and find

rental accommodation in that time. To be eligible for Bond Assistance the person must not rent for more than 50% of their income.

Both of the above criteria seem to be perfectly reasonable but there are very few low cost rentals within our shire and when they do become available attract many applicants. We have had many Centrelink clients who have said they feel they are not accepted because they are on benefits. Some low cost rentals are also in poor condition which people feel obliged to accept.

There are only two Caravan Parks in the Shire which are usually full and are almost as expensive as a rental property.

The Shire has a small Youth Refuge which can accommodate 4 boys and 4 girls at the same time. Approximately 7 years ago The Family Refuge 'Short Term Accommodation' at Mittagong, funded by Vincent de Paul, was closed due to the lack of resources to cover legislation requirements without government supported funds. A Brokerage Service 'Pathways' was initiated after the refuge closure. Pathways is a program for women with or without children who have experienced domestic violence or an accommodation crisis. Pathways has the use of three Transitional Houses which are managed by Argyle Community Housing with \$20,000 funding provided by Council each year to cover additional costs that may occur.


Over the past 12 months HCC has assisted 134 individuals and families who are homeless or with no fixed address. Quite a few of these people, due to degrees of mental health and addiction issues, are on the TICA list making them ineligible for private rental. Argyle Community Housing, who also manages DOH stock in the Wingecarribee, has 203 people on their Wingecarribee waiting list with an average 412 days waiting period.

For many people the chance of getting their own accommodation is bleak. Some people seem to travel around from area to area hoping to get some assistance and even spend time on evening trains to stay warm in the winter.

There are times when we feel that an old fashioned Boarding House would be a great asset as it could provide accommodation for the period it takes for people to sort out their housing issues.

Highlands Community Centres welcomes the opportunity to comment to your committee and provide an overview of the issues within Wingecarribee Shire

Yours sincerely



Nikki McAdoo
Manager