

**INQUIRY INTO HOMELESSNESS AMONGST OLDER  
PEOPLE AGED OVER 55 IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Community Action, Our Lady of Dolours Church Chatswood  
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*Our Lady of Dolours Catholic Church, Chatswood*

## **SUBMISSION TO THE NSW UPPER HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES**

### **Inquiry into homelessness amongst older people aged over 55 in New South Wales.**

We are a parish committee seeking to be the face and voice of Jesus in Chatswood and its environs. As such we are confronted daily by the increase in the number of rough sleepers on the streets and in stairwells and doorways of shopping centres. We recognise that homelessness is a complex matter with an array of causes including mental health problems and addiction. Our own conversations with people on our streets have identified some for whom homelessness is a choice and others who have case workers seeking to find them a place. We have met a woman and child newly homeless after fleeing a DV situation and in our own group we have a member who relied on family to provide her a bed and when this was no longer available, had a long and worrying search before she was able to find an affordable place to rent. Another member of the group was forced from her home with her two daughters after a particularly violent attack by her husband. She hoped to stay in the northern suburbs so that her daughters would not have to leave the school where they had friends. 'It was bad enough losing their father and their home, without them also losing their school and their friends'. But she could not find affordable rental accommodation and was forced to uproot the girls and herself at the worst time of their lives.

These personal contacts with homelessness led our group to campaign with others for Ku-ring-gai Council to do its share of the heavy lifting required by all levels of government to address homelessness in NSW. We discovered that Ku-ring-gai Council, perhaps alone in NSW, did not have an Affordable Housing policy and that the Council had instructed Council Staff not to consider preparing one. The then Mayor, Jennifer Anderson, used a statement by the Minister for Planning, Rob Stokes that Councils were not legally obliged to follow the State Government's housing plans, to re-write the NSW planning guidelines regarding mid-density housing that was designed to help provide affordable housing and rent.

Members of our group met with past Ku-ring-gai Mayors to ask them about the lack of an affordable housing and rental policy, and each indicated that Ku-ring-gai residents, in their view, saw affordable housing as detrimental to their house values and amenity and that they agreed with them. We also met with members of the FOKE organisation and the Support Lindfield Association who worked politically to oppose any supporter of 'high density' housing including any advocate of affordable housing and rental. We found it difficult to have an audience for a nuanced conversation that referenced international examples of affordable and

social housing that blend comfortably in high-value residential areas. It was made clear in these conversations that the fundamental objection was not just the appearance of social and affordable housing but the assumed low-social status of intended occupants. We also held an extended meeting with the local State member and former Minister for Housing, Alister Henskens, who told us that we would never get Ku-ring-gai residents to support affordable housing because NIMBY attitudes would prevail. He also suggested that it was ill-considered on our part to think that Ku-ring-gai should be required to provide its contribution to social and affordable housing and suggested focusing on Hornsby and areas further out.

We are making this submission to the Upper House Inquiry to underline the need for change to public perceptions of those who experience homelessness, especially the aged and more particularly, women over 55. Public negative attitudes, especially in entitled areas like the Northern Suburbs of Sydney must be reversed. This is an area with plenty of space, house lots that can be readily developed into affordable housing, a population with the education to understand the factors causing people, women especially, to become homeless. There are also churches with surplus land whose congregations are keen to develop them into rental accommodation affordable by the homeless. Leadership and support are required to tap into these resources.

We submit that an alliance between the NSW government and social organisations, churches and NFP's with a role in housing can provide both the moral and logistical leadership that can quieten the NIMBY response, provide environmentally positive housing solutions and tap into the property resources currently locked up on the North Shore. Such an initiative is essential to help address the growing problem of homelessness especially among women over 55 who lose their homes due to sickness, unemployment, domestic violence and/or increasing rental prices and interest charges on mortgages.

Jo Karaolis

Committee Chair,

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