



The Salvation Army Victoria State Budget Submission

2015-16





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About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in 126 countries worldwide. In Australia, the Salvos are widely known and relied upon to deliver practical responses to individuals, families and communities in crisis. Whilst we interact on a daily basis with people from all walks of life, we recognise a particular calling to those who might otherwise fall through the gaps of our social security nets, those who find themselves on the margins of our communities, and those who struggle to have their voices heard.

This support for disadvantaged Australians is driven by our values: human dignity, justice, hope, compassion and community. We share our community's belief in a 'fair go' for all, which grounds our commitment to social justice and a particular interest in the health and wellbeing of those most vulnerable in our society.

In Victoria, The Salvation Army has been helping people in need for more than 130 years. Today Salvation Army churches, community centres and social service networks provide more than 350 distinct social program activities in urban, regional and rural areas across the state. These programmatic responses range from frontline emergency support services and highly targeted, intensive interventions, through to more generalist life stage responses.



PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- youth, adult and aged homelessness and housing services;
- family and domestic violence support and accommodation services;
- material aid and emergency relief;
- financial counselling and assistance, including gamblers' help;
- personal counselling and support;
- drug and alcohol support and treatment services;
- youth services, including out-of-home care;
- aged care services;
- emergency disaster response and recovery services;
- education, training and employment services;
- chaplaincy and support services in courts and prisons;
- services for refugees and asylum seekers; and
- community mental health services.

Our Current Environment

The Commonwealth Government's 2014-15 Budget introduced the harshest cuts to social services in decades and consequently pushed increased responsibility for caring for our communities' most vulnerable people towards the states. Cuts to welfare payments and services across the country are disproportionately borne by the poorest people in Australia while the wealthiest groups remain largely unaffected. As unemployment rises across the country, and particularly in Victoria, tighter restrictions to access Youth Allowance, Newstart and Disability Support payments, as well as the reintroduction of Work for the Dole, are likely to further entrench poverty and inequality. Rising housing prices, costs of utilities and general costs of living show no signs of abating and will continue to squeeze the budgets of low income earners. Looming increases to the cost of medical services are also adding to the stress of members of the community. At the same time the retendering of Emergency Relief and Financial Counselling programs, cuts to education, health, youth and Indigenous programs make it unclear where disadvantaged individuals in our communities can turn to for help. These cuts will be felt acutely in Victoria.

Under the previous Government, an ambitious reform agenda has been changing the landscape of Victorian community services. Some of these reforms were overdue and still promise value for improved services. However, we are also seeing several unintended consequences that are negatively affecting the sector's ability to provide services to those who need our help. For instance, the recommissioning of Community Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs treatment services has dramatically reduced the number of services that clients have to choose from and cost both these sectors in the loss of specialist expertise. The recommissioning has also changed how individuals access services and how services refer clients, impacting upon their ability to provide holistic support. Admittedly, these systems are new and some of the issues currently being experienced with referrals may subside over time. However, in the meantime our services are expressing concern that many clients with complex needs are at increased risk of falling through widening gaps.

The 2015-16 Victorian State Budget is the first budget of a new election cycle and thus the first opportunity for the new government to tangibly demonstrate how it will provide for its most vulnerable citizens. As a faith-based community service organisation focused on helping the most vulnerable members of our society, The Salvation Army specialises in working with people who all too often fall through the gaps of our social safety nets. The basis for this submission comes from consultations with Salvation Army services across the state to discuss the most pressing issues affecting our clients. These consultations identified five groups of people as particularly disadvantaged at the moment, including:

Vulnerable and Unemployed Young People

Women and Children Escaping Family Violence

Asylum Seekers

People Exiting Prison

People with Mental Health Issues and Complex Needs

Vulnerable and Unemployed Young People



Anna's Story

Anna is 18 years old and her life so far has been dominated by physical, sexual and emotional abuse. She was often left alone from a very early age and recalls crying for hours without anyone noticing her. Anna's father was physically and sexually abusive towards her throughout her childhood and later taught her brother to continue the same pattern of abuse.

Unsurprisingly, Anna had a highly disrupted education, rarely attended school and eventually dropped out in year 10. Around this time, Anna made friends with a group of young people who engaged in low level criminal activity and she began to use cannabis and alcohol with them. At 16, she left home, initially spending several months couch surfing and on a few occasions sleeping rough on the streets or in squats. During this time, Anna continued to be sexually abused by the people she stayed with and usually considered this abuse to be the cost of being allowed to stay. Anna's drug usage increased, expanding to include Ice (methamphetamine) and prescription pills (benzodiazepines).

Eventually, the criminal activities that supported Anna's drug usage and place in her peer group culminated in a stay at Parkville Youth Justice Precinct. Anna received some counselling and support while at Parkville but without support she returned to homelessness shortly after being released. For several months afterwards, Anna bounced between youth refuges, homelessness, couch surfing, and eventually a stay at a residential withdrawal and rehabilitation program. During this time, significant mental health problems became apparent, including anxiety, depression and feelings of hopelessness, which culminated in a suicide attempt. She was prescribed medication, but in the absence of ongoing support, her accommodation continually broke down and her treatment was unable to be continued. It was at this point that she came to The Salvation Army.

Making the transition from adolescence to adulthood is difficult for any young person but for those with traumatic childhoods, who have no family or friends to support them, the transition to independence can be much harder.

While accommodated at a Salvation Army refuge, Anna reengaged with a mental health service and started to take her medication again. She was also offered counselling

which, combined with the stability the refuge provided, helped her begin to deal with the abuse that she had experienced, which is a significant contributor to her mental health issues. Anna has been offered legal support to help her address outstanding public transport fines and other charges related to theft and property damage. She has also improved her literacy and numeracy skills, as well as general living skills, despite having been assessed as having a learning disability. Anna continues to work with her support worker towards recovering from her abusive past and mental health issues. She is currently waiting to access a place in transitional housing, where she will continue to be supported.

YOUNG PEOPLE FALLING THROUGH THE GAPS

Making the transition from adolescence to adulthood is difficult for any young person but for those with traumatic childhoods, who have no family or friends to support them, the transition to independence can be much harder. As Anna's Story illustrates, many young people do not have any supports to assist them through this difficult period of their life. Like Anna, most of them have experienced some combination of family breakdown, violence and abuse, involvement with child protection and poor education outcomes. As a consequence of their disrupted and chaotic home environments, they may suffer developmental delays, have learning difficulties and subsequently face mental health issues and addictions. Young people in these situations often do not have their needs met in mainstream services such as schools and are at higher risk of coming into contact with the justice system and becoming homeless.

High youth unemployment rates, restrictions to income support payments, rising education costs and costs of living, all combine to make finding employment and becoming independent increasingly hard for young people. In Victoria, The Salvation Army operates three youth refuges, more than 50 youth support programs and 16 residential care units. Consultations with these services identified the following areas where vulnerable young people are currently falling through the gaps.

KEY ISSUES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Vulnerable young people who were never formally involved in child protection but have similar histories and needs are at risk of falling through the gaps because they cannot access the same supports as care leavers.

Our services repeatedly identified a group of vulnerable young people, like Anna, who had experienced disrupted childhoods, family breakdown, and other significant risk factors such as mental illness, substance abuse and violence, but did not have any formal involvement with child protection or statutory care. Salvation Army youth refuges across the state report that 25 to 50 per cent of the young people they work with have had some statutory involvement with child protection. However, services also work with a significant group of young people who come to their service after having left home around 15 or 16 years of age to escape traumatising and/or abusive situations and are now homeless. These young people, who are dealing with similar vulnerabilities to care leavers, are not eligible to receive the same supports put in place for young people leaving care. For example, the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) used to be available to all vulnerable young people at risk of homelessness but recently has been restricted to those young people leaving statutory care. Similarly, the Springboard Program is only available to care leavers, and care leavers have access to free TAFE courses whereas other vulnerable young people do not.

Research has widely documented the significant barriers that young people face upon leaving care and the increased support that is required for successful transitions to independent living. The Salvation Army is concerned that a different group of highly vulnerable young people, who were never involved in statutory care but probably should have been, are being missed and increasingly falling through the gaps.

Recommendation:

Extend supports currently available to care leavers to the wider range of vulnerable young people.

2. High levels of debt from public transport fines and minor charges exacerbate disadvantage and marginalisation amongst vulnerable young people.

Many young people come to our services with significant accumulated fines for minor offences such as travelling on public transport without a ticket. For young people struggling to survive on Youth Allowance or Newstart, paying these fines is practically impossible.

In many cases, young people like Anna rely on public transport to get around, even though their budgets are so severely constrained that they cannot afford it. Not being able to use public transport impacts upon their ability to be part of the community, attend a doctor's appointment, a course or employment, and increases their isolation. Faced with a difficult choice, too many young people are currently taking a risk by evading fare payment and consequently end up with even more insurmountable costs.

The vast majority of fines issued to the young people we work with are revoked due to special circumstances. However, the process to achieve this takes time and is costly to the young person, the support agency, and to the courts to follow these fines up.

Fining vulnerable members of our community, including young people, who have no ability to pay to use public transport, is costing the court system a significant amount of money and further marginalising an already disadvantaged and isolated group in our community. Instead of dealing with the symptoms of this problem when it's already too late, ie. through the courts, a far better solution would be to apply the understanding of exigent circumstances that exists in our justice system, to our public transport system in a proactive manner. In the same way that the NSW Government offers free public transport to school students and pensioners have access to free off-peak public transport in WA and SA, the Victorian Government could make public transport available to vulnerable Victorians on low incomes, who otherwise cannot afford to pay. Not only would this reduce unnecessary costs in infringement processing and courts, but would also ease financial stress amongst low income earners and increase their capacity to attend education, training and job seeking activities.

Recommendation:

Provide free off-peak public transport to all health care card holders.

3. Flexible education and training options are lacking for young people who struggle to excel in mainstream settings.

Like Anna, many of the young people that The Salvation Army works with do not cope well in mainstream education and have a history of poor educational outcomes. In some cases this can be explained by learning or developmental problems, or intellectual disability. However, it is more often attributable to the influence of chaotic, abusive or neglectful home environments. As the result of early disengagement with school, many lack the fundamental skills, including basic literacy and numeracy, that are critical to workforce participation and vocational fulfilment.



There is a lack of flexible education options available to young Victorians who need to improve these fundamental skills. The Salvation Army welcomes the Labor Government's commitment to investing in TAFEs and Technical Education. This investment will greatly help reduce the financial strain currently being experienced by TAFEs and help secure the industry's future.

Salvation Army frontline services report that VCAL also provides a good opportunity for the young people we work with and should be expanded. Our services also report that more alternative educational and vocational development opportunities, such as social enterprises, need to be made available that focus on building fundamental skills as well as helping young people acquire industry specific skills that will provide a pathway into meaningful employment. Too often young people engage in a course to fulfil JSA criteria but find they are still unable to secure employment after completion. This is frustrating for young people and acts as a disincentive to further educational engagement.

Recommendation:

Increase investment in TAFEs and other alternative education options to provide fundamental skills courses and practical work experience.

Vulnerable young people, like Anna, will find it harder to reengage with education and training opportunities now that funding for the Youth Connections program has been cut. It is estimated that 10,000 young people in Victoria are currently disengaged from any kind of education or training.¹ Supporting these young people to re-engage in school and stay connected to their communities greatly reduces their risk of becoming homeless later in life. Youth Connections provided flexible, individualised responses to young people at risk or disengaged from education and training. In Victoria, the program supported an average of 4,600 young people each year, of which approximately 2,500 were between 13 and 17 years of age.² The program had been highly successful in working with young people who are at risk and helping these young people re-engage in education and training and strengthen ties to their communities and family. Funding for Youth Connections ended on 31 December 2014. Without a similar program funded to work with this group of young people, more will disengage from school and be at increased risk of falling through the gaps for the rest of their lives.

Recommendation:

Provide funding to support vulnerable young people to reengage in education and training options in light of the discontinued Youth Connections program.

1. Victoria Youth Connections Provider Network (2014) Proposal to the Victorian State Government
2. Victoria Youth Connections Provider Network (2014) Proposal to the Victorian State Government

4. Lack of affordable housing options prevents young people from living independently.

The number of young people coming to our services looking for accommodation continues to increase. Too many services with limited capacity face a growing line of young people every night looking for a place to stay and nowhere to go. A chronic shortage of crisis accommodation beds makes it impossible to meet demand.

High rental prices, low incomes and a lack of references make accessing private rental extremely difficult for vulnerable young people. Private rental brokerage programs can be successful in housing young people who have established independent living skills. Current DHS standards allow brokerage assistance for young people who pay up to 55 per cent of their income in rent. For a single young person on Youth Allowance and receiving Rent Assistance, this equals about \$170 a week. Despite high housing costs, in 2013-14 the Youth Private Rental Access Program (YPRAP) at St Kilda Youth and Family Services housed 59 young people in private rental at a total cost of \$84,900 or an average of \$1,450 per young person. Currently, more than 90 per cent of those tenancies have been maintained.

Unfortunately, due to the high costs of housing, even with private rental brokerage support, most young people can only afford to live in share houses in outer suburbs where there is limited public transport. This can make travelling to education, training or employment options much more difficult. Case management and Creating Connections Education Employment Pathways (CEEP) funding are used by YPRAP to support young people in the early stages of their tenancy. However, funding for both CEEP and YRPAP are due to end in June 2015. Vulnerable young people already have few housing options available to them. Without a continuation of this funding to help services support young people into private rental and support their tenancy, housing options will become even more limited.

Recommendation:

Extend flexible brokerage funding for programs like CEEP and YPRAP to continue to support young people into private rental, education and employment.

Women and Children Escaping Family Violence



Belinda's Story

Belinda and James have lived on the outer suburban fringe of Melbourne since their wedding, just over 15 years ago. Belinda works in local government and has been an active contributor at their children's primary school in the past. For most of their married life, she has endured violence from her husband.

What started as occasional verbal abuse became more frequent over time and in the last 6-7 years has included increasingly regular violent physical assaults. James has also threatened to harm the family pets and to take the children away from Belinda.

One evening several years ago, concerned neighbours rang the police who came and took James away. However, he was back before long and Belinda didn't feel able to keep him out, nor did she have anywhere else to take herself and the children. The abuse continued and Belinda started to pull back from the little social contact that she had and often had to call in sick to work in order to hide the abuse. Their 9 year old son began to have problems at school and Belinda was called to pick him up on several occasions. Their daughter, aged 6, became increasingly socially withdrawn.

Three months ago, in the midst of a particularly violent outburst, the police were called again and James was removed from the home and charged by the police, who also connected Belinda with a Salvation Army Family Violence service. Because

she didn't feel safe enough to go home that night, Belinda and her children were assisted into temporary accommodation, where a Salvation Army worker met with them to ensure that their immediate needs were met and that they were safe.

The next day, Belinda was supported to obtain an Intervention Order against James but she was still worried that he would force his way into the house. The worker and Belinda developed a plan to secure her home, including caring for the pets for a few days. The plan included changing all of the locks, installing safety screens to windows, CCTV and sensor security lighting to three points in the grounds of the property. Belinda was also given a SafeTCard personal alarm. Within a week, Belinda and the children were able to return to their home.

Since then, James has breached the Intervention Order on two occasions but Belinda and the children have remained safe, keeping in contact with both police and her Salvation Army case manager. Belinda has returned to work and started volunteering at the school again.

In the last year one of The Salvation Army's Crisis Services, the Family Violence Outreach Program, received over 3,000 L17 faxbacks from police, 30 per cent more than the year before.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FALLING THROUGH THE GAPS

Statistics indicate that one in every three women in Australia will experience domestic violence at some point in their life.³ In Australia, one woman every week is murdered by their current or former partner.⁴ Thankfully, these shocking statistics have galvanised many in the community to take action. Victoria Police has dramatically improved how police officers respond to incidents of family

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violence over the last several years and former Commissioner Ken Lay has consistently denounced family violence and community attitudes that tolerate violence against women. The Salvation Army welcomes Labor's intentional focus on reducing family violence through the creation of a dedicated ministerial portfolio for the Prevention of Family Violence. The forthcoming Royal Commission will show conclusively that despite recent efforts, there is still much that remains to be done. Women and children escaping family violence continue to be highly vulnerable and face many barriers to leaving an abusive relationship. Family violence also remains the leading cause of homelessness for women and children.⁵

The Salvation Army runs four family violence services across the state, two of which are in metropolitan Melbourne and two in regional areas. We see firsthand the challenges that women and children face when trying to escape family violence. Consultations with our services identified the following issues with the current system that need to be improved to better support women and children who have experienced family violence.

KEY ISSUES FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE

1. Services are under resourced to meet demand.

Improved practice by Victoria police has led to an increase in reporting rates, which is a positive outcome for women seeking to leave a violent relationship. However, increased reporting rates have amplified the demand placed on family violence services to respond and made it difficult to work with women as holistically as desired. For example, in the last year one of The Salvation Army's Crisis Services, the Family Violence Outreach Program, received over 3,000 L17 faxes from police, 30 per cent more than the year before. Each L17 is followed up with four phone calls in an attempt to offer support, with 10-15 per cent of contacts made resulting in case management engagement. The volume of referrals massively outweighs case management capacity, putting additional pressure on staff who already have their own caseloads to work with.

Auxiliary services, such as financial counselling and legal aid, which are used to support women and help them gain independence, are also under resourced to meet the level of demand being experienced in the family violence sector. Many women with experiences like Belinda may need counselling to help them process the violence and trauma that they have experienced. Unfortunately, the limited number of community-based counselling services are difficult to access due to long wait times and private counselling services are often unaffordable. Similarly, some women escaping family violence have suffered economic abuse and may have never had the opportunity to control or manage their own money. Financial counselling can be beneficial to help them achieve financial independence. However, wait times for financial counselling can take months.

3. Domestic Violence Victoria – Key Statistics <http://www.dvvic.org.au/index.php/understanding-family-violence/key-statistics.html>

4. Domestic Violence Victoria – Key Statistics <http://www.dvvic.org.au/index.php/understanding-family-violence/key-statistics.html>

5. VicHealth (2004). The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease Caused by Intimate Partner Violence. VicHealth, Melbourne.

Access to legal services is also inadequate. Women escaping family violence often have ongoing legal issues to work through including intervention orders, custody of children, and women like Belinda may also have to deal with the settlement of joint assets such as the family home. Despite the prevalence of these challenges, legal support options are limited. Court Legal Aid services cannot work with the perpetrator and women due to conflicts of interest. Therefore if the perpetrator accesses this service first, the woman is left with fewer options. Private legal representation is usually unaffordable for women escaping violence and cuts to community legal services have significantly reduced their capacity. The Salvation Army is pleased that Labor has recognised the need for increased legal support and promised \$1.2M for more family violence duty lawyers at the Magistrates' Courts. This funding will begin to relieve some of the pressure on legal services and increase access to support for women escaping family violence.

The Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service in Melbourne's northern suburbs reported that 44 per cent of their client group was from CALD backgrounds. Women and children from CALD backgrounds come with additional needs such as language barriers, immigration issues, sometimes large numbers of children, no income, no family or community supports, and often little understanding of the social system. These women and children are more likely to stay in refuges or motels longer because they cannot afford private rental and are often not eligible for public housing. Not only is housing women and children in refuges and motels for extended periods of time incredibly costly for the organisation, but it is also very disruptive for the family. Stays in crisis accommodation usually move families out of their local communities and ties to education, employment, community and family become difficult to maintain. Assisting women with their immigration status is also problematic. Cuts to community legal services again make accessing this service difficult. Currently, there is only one organisation in the state to provide immigration and visa specific legal support. The additional resources required to support families from CALD backgrounds needs to be taken into account when resourcing family violence services.

Recommendation:

Fully fund services to deal with increased demand for family violence supports.

2. Lack of affordable housing.

Family violence is the number one cause of homelessness among women and children in Australia. Lack of affordable housing is the leading reason women return to abusive relationships. In addition to lack of resources within family violence services to deal with demand, a chronic lack of crisis accommodation, long waitlists for social housing and unaffordable private rental make accommodation options scarce for women and children escaping family violence.

Safe At Home programs, such as the one that supported Belinda and her children, prioritise women and children's right to stay in the family home and remove the perpetrator. The Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service runs a Safe At Home program that has been particularly successful in safely housing women and their children in their home after the perpetrator leaves. A combination of Safe At Home, Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT), and philanthropic funds are used to provide outreach case management support, repair damages to the property, improve lighting, install security doors, change locks, replace official documents, and organise legal responsibility for the property. The service partners with a security firm to provide specialised security assessments and if needed a personal SafeTCard for emergencies.

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Safe At Home interventions such as Belinda's cost roughly one third the amount of money it would take to accommodate a woman and her children in

crisis accommodation or transitional housing. An evaluation of a Safe At Home program in the Hume region estimated that a woman and her children housed through the usual pathways cost \$10,195.90, whereas a Safe At Home response for the same family only cost \$3,755.12.⁶ In the last financial year, The Salvation Army Crossroads Family Violence Service successfully kept 44 women and their children in their home and out of the homelessness system through a Safe At Home response. Using the above costing, this means not only were 44 women and their children diverted from homelessness, but this single program saved the family violence sector \$283,394 in the last year alone. Unfortunately, despite the significant progress made developing the Safe At Home response, the program is at risk due to a lack of commitment from the Commonwealth Government to renew the NPAH.

Private Rental Brokerage programs have also been successful in helping women and their children access private rental and avoid homelessness. On average, The Salvation Army's Crisis Services assists 50 families into private rental annually for an average cost of \$2,000 per family. This money can be used to help the woman cover the bond and first month's rent or to subsidise the cost of rent for up to 12 months depending on the woman's needs. Case management support is also provided if needed. Importantly, all of the tenancies placed last year have been successfully maintained.

Despite these programs' successes, there remain limitations in their ability to house women and children. Crossroads reported that of all the women they worked with, only two to three per cent were able, or chose, to stay in their home with a Safe At Home intervention. Similarly, at Crisis Services, of the women who received a case managed response, seven per cent were assessed as able to maintain private rental. As rental costs increase, this number is becoming even smaller. Women accessing private rental cannot be housed in a property that will cost them more than 55 per cent of their income in rent. As other costs of living such as utilities, transport, childcare and food increase it is becoming increasingly difficult for these families to get by on the remaining 45 per cent of their income, particularly if a family is dependent on income support payments.

The relatively small number of women who were able to access the above programs highlights the need for other affordable housing strategies to be introduced. For women who are unable to utilise these programs, public housing often remains the only other viable alternative, yet public housing waiting lists are impossibly long. In some cases our services have supported women and their children in transitional housing for years while they wait for public housing.

Safe At Home and Private Rental Brokerage programs offer significant cost savings and good outcomes for the women and children, like Belinda and her family, who are lucky enough to be able to utilise them. However, the chronic housing affordability crisis means that all housing options need to be expanded to ensure that women and children do not become homeless due to family violence.

Recommendation:

Increase funding for affordable housing options including Safe At Home and Private Rental Brokerage programs to make them more widely available.

6. Taylor, E. and Mackay, R. (2011) Bsafe final evaluation report, Women's Health Goulburn North East.

3. Lack of therapeutic support for children who experienced family violence.

Currently, family violence services are only funded to work with women experiencing family violence and are not funded to work with accompanying children. Yet, as in Belinda's case, many women have children who also need support. There is extensive research to show that children who experience or witness family violence

are at increased risk of developmental delays, mental illness and behavioural disorders.⁷ Research has also demonstrated that children who experience abuse and/or homelessness are more likely to become homeless and experience violence later in life.⁸

Because of this evidence, a number of Salvation Army services have started to develop specialised programs to help children process their experiences in a way appropriate to their stage of child development. The Salvation Army congratulates the Labor Government on committing \$2.5M for children's counsellors in the last election as acknowledgement of this need. The feedback we have received from

mothers and their children involved in these programs has been positive, suggesting that they have improved parenting capabilities and helped children adjust to school and reduce anxiety. On average our family violence services work with over 800 children a year, which is rapidly increasing as the number of women coming to our services increase and points to the growing need for an expansion of child specific programs within family violence services.

Research into the use of therapeutic care in the Out-of-Home Care (OHC) setting has shown that therapeutic support can help vulnerable children and young people recover from abuse and trauma. The Salvation Army Westcare and SalvoCare Eastern have trialled therapeutic care models for foster and residential care and found that participating children experienced increased ability to communicate and were able to better regulate their emotions and improved relationships with significant others in their life including carers and family.⁹ Based on our experience as service providers in both the family violence and the OHC sectors, we believe that the principles of therapeutic care practiced in OHC could easily be included in the practice of family violence services to better meet the needs of children accessing their services.

There is extensive research to show that children who experience or witness family violence are at increased risk of developmental delays, mental illness and behavioural disorders.

Recommendation:

Fund all family violence services to provide specialised services to children who have been affected by family violence.



7. Spinney, A., Blandy, S. (June 2011) AHURI. Homelessness Prevention for Women and Children Who Have Experienced Domestic and Family Violence: Innovations in Policy and Practice.

8. Nirui, M., Ferson, M., Glasgow, K., and Maher, L. (February 2013) Parity. Unpacking the Impact of Homelessness on Children's Health and Well-Being. Volume 26 Issue 1

9. Frederic, M., Long, M., McNamara, P., McPherson, L., Rose, R., and Gilbert, K. (2012) The Circle Program An evaluation of a therapeutic approach to Foster care. Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, Australia.

Asylum Seekers



Grace's Story

Grace came to The Salvation Army Asylum Seeker Support Service highly distressed and with very limited English. With the assistance of a translator, Grace reported that since arriving in Australia six months earlier, she had been sleeping on the couches of various friends and acquaintances. Many of the places she stayed at were already overcrowded. Food supplies were frugal and there were always difficulties paying rent and utility bills. Despite doing some work around the house, Grace was unable to contribute financially to household expenses or even provide her own food and because of this she had successively worn out her welcome at each place. Stuck waiting on visa processing and technicalities, she could not apply for the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme, had no income and nowhere to sleep that night.

To further complicate matters, on her way to seek help from The Salvation Army, Grace had been given a fine of more than \$200 for travelling on public transport without a ticket. The encounter made her fear for her own safety because abuse by authorities is common in her home country. Her broken English also meant that she was unable to explain her situation to the

Authorised Officer. Grace was deeply ashamed that she had broken the law and was extremely anxious about being detained or deported as a result. She had no way of paying the fine and with no fixed address she may incur additional expenses if further correspondence does not reach her.

Although some asylum seekers are allowed to live in the community, they are afforded no means by which to support themselves.

In addition to the exigencies of her own situation, Grace expressed grave concern for the safety of her family back home. The instability of her living and financial plight meant that she had had no contact with them for over four months. Though she had tried to seek support from both individuals and other agencies in the past, everyone she went to seemed to be stretched beyond their capacity to help.

A Salvation Army worker helped Grace to navigate the limited remaining possibilities for housing within the sector and did eventually find a place for her. In addition, she was given food assistance and the resources she needed to establish herself in her new accommodation. A request sent on her behalf to have the public transport fine waived was rejected and an invoice was subsequently received asking The Salvation Army to pay the fine. The Salvation Army continues to provide support to Grace as she awaits the outcome of her visa application.

ASYLUM SEEKERS FALLING THROUGH THE GAPS

Per capita, more asylum seekers live in Victoria than any other state. The recent Victorian Auditor General's report, *Access to Services for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, estimates that approximately a third of asylum seekers live in Victoria. From December 2007 to 2013, 31,735 humanitarian entrants settled in the state.¹⁰ On 30 September 2014, there were 9,357 asylum seekers on Bridging E Visas living in Victoria.¹¹

Asylum seekers like Grace are particularly vulnerable because, in addition to having significant cultural and language barriers to overcome, they lack access to any government safety nets, most are forbidden to work and they face long-term uncertainty regarding their immigration status and ability to remain in Australia. In addition, many asylum seekers and refugees who come from war torn countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and Sri Lanka have experienced significant trauma, and in some cases torture, both in their home country and during their journey to Australia. Increasingly asylum seekers are arriving in Victoria with significant and complex physical and mental health conditions, which compound already high levels of vulnerability. Increasingly punitive Commonwealth Government policies restrict asylum seekers' access to services such as income support. In addition, immigration applications for some asylum seekers on Bridging E Visas are not being processed, resulting in their bridging visas being allowed to expire and further reducing access to visa-dependent services like Medicare.

While state governments have limited influence over national immigration policies, it is possible for the Victorian Government to mitigate poverty and vulnerability in our local communities by including asylum seekers in community services and supports. In response to the large asylum seeker and refugee population, the Victorian Government has previously made a number of state-based health and community services available to asylum seekers including public hospitals, dental services, emergency ambulances, community health services and public transport concessions. The Victorian Government has also established a Settlement Coordination Unit and funded initiatives such as the Victorian refugee and asylum seeker health action plan 2014–2018, and the Refugee Health Network.¹² These types of initiatives are essential to asylum seekers' survival in the community. However, significant gaps remain that leave many asylum seekers isolated and dependent on community service organisations for subsistence.

The Salvation Army works with 600–800 asylum seekers each year through the Asylum Seeker Support Service in Brunswick and many more through other social services across the state, particularly homelessness and emergency relief centres. Services across all regions and sectors are reporting increased numbers of asylum seekers requesting assistance as they struggle to make ends meet.

Many families cannot afford utilities. If they are lucky enough to have housing, they can literally be sitting in the dark, with no heating and no means of cooking.

10. VAGO (2014) *Access to Services for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers*. P 2

11. Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection (September 2014) *Illegal Maritime Arrivals on Bridging E Visa*. P 14

12. Victoria Department of Health. *Diversity in Health: Refugee and asylum seeker health*.

KEY ISSUES FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

1. High housing costs and costs of living make it difficult for asylum seekers to survive without government income supports.

Of the over 9,000 asylum seekers living in Victoria on Bridging E Visas, about 1,300 of them are living in community detention in housing provided by the Red Cross, AMES and consortium partners of these organisations.¹³ The remaining 7,700 people, such as Grace, are left to survive in the community while waiting on the outcome of their application for asylum.

Although some asylum seekers are allowed to live in the community, they are afforded no means by which to support themselves. Complex and ever shifting rules about who can access government supports while they wait for their application to be approved are based on how and when individuals arrived in Australia and sought asylum. These rules determine if individuals have a right to work or have access to any financial assistance through the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme (ASAS) or Community Assistance Support (CAS) program. If an asylum seeker is eligible for financial assistance through these schemes, living subsidies are minimal and are set at 89 per cent of the lowest Centrelink payment, \$230 a week for a single person, and 89 per cent of Commonwealth Rental Assistance, \$38. Many asylum seekers and their families do not even qualify for these schemes and have no access to any sort of income. In their 2014 Annual Report, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre estimated that as many as half of all families accessing their food bank had no income at all.¹⁴

The lack of affordable or accessible housing options results in most asylum seekers living in overcrowded accommodation with family, friends, or other members of their community. Salvation Army homelessness and emergency relief services are reporting substantial increases in the number of asylum seekers accessing their programs. In the past year, Salvation Army services across Victoria worked with 2,714 people identified as asylum seekers, an increase of 63 per cent since the year before. An increase in the number of asylum seekers is problematic for services because of the additional supports asylum seekers need such as interpreters and legal support to deal with immigration issues. Asylum seekers are not eligible for public housing and have very little, if any, income to pay for any other type of housing. As a result, they are likely to remain in motels or other emergency accommodation for extended periods of time at full cost to the community service agency because there is simply nowhere else for them to go.

Food and utilities are also unaffordable for asylum seekers. For people without any income, they are completely dependent on community services for food and other essential items such as nappies, baby aid, clothing or furniture. Demand continues to grow, placing increased pressure on a system that is already struggling to cope with the need. Staff at The Salvation Army's Asylum Seeker Support Service report that many families cannot afford utilities. If they are lucky enough to have housing, they can literally be sitting in the dark, with no heating and no means of cooking. Currently, asylum seekers are not eligible for utility concessions. While access to these concessions will not fix the many other challenges asylum seekers face, reducing the cost of utilities will help.

Recommendation:

Extend concessions for utilities to asylum seekers.

13. VAGO (2014) Access to Services for Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers. P 2

14. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. (2014) Annual Report 2014. <http://www.asrc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/ASRCAR3-webready.pdf>

2. Lack of access to community services, transport and supports make asylum seekers socially isolated and vulnerable.

In addition to the inability to pay for essential needs such as food, utilities and housing, asylum seekers experience extreme isolation in the community because they cannot access community services. A key contributor to this isolation is limited English and the need for interpreters. At the moment, interpreters are provided to refugees free of charge by the Victorian Government. However, no funding is provided to community service organisations to access interpreters for asylum seekers. In addition, access to interpreters can also be problematic. High increases in some asylum seeker populations have increased demand for certain languages. The numbers of interpreters for these groups has not increased.

Recommendation:

Fully fund the cost of interpreter services for community service organisations working with asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers also experience transport disadvantage as many of them are not able to afford public transport tickets. Currently, asylum seekers are eligible for public transport concessions if they have been provided with a letter from their case worker. However, awareness of this scheme among ticketing inspectors is not consistent resulting in asylum seekers being fined unfairly. For many asylum seekers with no income, such as Grace, even paying concession rates is unmanageable.

As many as half of all families accessing their food bank had no income at all.

Being unable to utilise public transport because of cost or fear of breaking the law compounds the level of isolation and anxiety asylum seekers already face as a result of linguistic and cultural barriers. This in turn makes it difficult for them to access social services or community supports such as healthcare, counselling and welfare programs. The lack of access to public transport and resulting inability to go anywhere to meet members of their community or access services is also considered to be a huge contributor to depression and despair among asylum seekers.¹⁵

The Salvation Army and other welfare agencies provide some access to public transport via emergency relief Myki day passes. However, The Salvation Army does not receive any funds to provide emergency relief to asylum seekers and is only able to provide Myki day passes in times of emergencies. Without a more systemic approach, asylum seekers will continue to be unjustly fined and be pushed into further poverty, isolation and despair. While the Victorian Government should be commended for giving asylum seekers access to concession rates on public transport, there remains a critical gap in asylum seekers' ability to use public transport to access vital services.

Recommendation:

Provide free off-peak public transport to asylum seekers.

15. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. (2012) Destitute and Uncertain: The Reality of Seeking Asylum in Australia.



3. Limited access to education, particularly tertiary education, prevents asylum seekers from gaining necessary skills to integrate and participate as active members in society.

The Salvation Army's experience of working with asylum seekers is that they do not want to be dependent on welfare but have a strong desire to start a new chapter of their lives and actively take part in their community. In addition, asylum seekers as a group tend to value education highly, particularly for their children, as they see education as the key to a better life. Unfortunately, access to education, particularly post-secondary education, remains difficult.

Currently, asylum seeker children are eligible to attend public primary and secondary schools. However, programs such as the Education Maintenance Allowance, which allowed asylum seeker children to be included have been cut and rebranded. We are pleased to see the Labor Government commit additional money to schools through the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund and the State Schools Relief Fund. However, we are concerned that disadvantaged children, such as asylum seekers, who do not attend a school that is eligible for this funding, will no longer receive the financial assistance they need. Parents of these children frequently come to The Salvation Army distressed that they cannot afford the required uniforms or books for their children. The Salvation Army Asylum Seeker Support Service has been able to provide limited support to these children and their families through public and corporate donations. However, the income from these donations is variable and can neither be relied upon nor matched to levels of demand.

Recommendation:

Ensure that funding for disadvantaged students, including asylum seekers, is available regardless of which school they attend.

Asylum seekers are currently ineligible for tertiary education fee assistance, which makes this level of education unaffordable and inaccessible. This is problematic for adults who are arriving in Australia with limited English and little education and for skilled asylum seekers whose qualifications are not recognised. Lack of access to tertiary education is also problematic for unaccompanied minors who are eligible to attend secondary school but are not given any pathways to continue education once they turn 18. These young people are extremely vulnerable as they often have no family or community supports, have suffered significant amounts of trauma, and then are given no support once they turn 18 to live independently, continue education or find employment. Many will become homeless or involved in the justice system.

90 per cent of asylum seekers are eventually found to be genuine refugees.

While many asylum seekers currently have no right to work, this is not the case for all asylum seekers. Some asylum seekers living in the community, including those granted Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), currently have work rights. However, even with work rights, unrecognised qualifications, insufficient English, and lack of understanding of Australian culture or how to find employment can create additional barriers to employment. On average, 90 per cent of asylum seekers are eventually found to be genuine refugees and granted permanent protection¹⁶ with 2,752 asylum seeker claims being accepted across Australia and allowed to settle in 2013-14.¹⁷ In 2009, an audit of asylum seeker skills found that 40 per cent of working aged asylum seekers had skills on DIAC's Skilled Occupation List for General Skilled Migration.¹⁸ Many asylum seekers have something to offer to their community. Facilitating asylum seekers' ability to learn English and gain skills to be used in the work force is imperative to ensuring that once they are allowed to settle in Australia, these individuals are able to find employment and move on with their lives. Being able to access education is the crux of that ability.

Recommendation:

Provide asylum seekers free access to TAFE and other vocational education options.

16. ASRC (2013) Asylum Seekers and Refugees: Myths, Facts and Solutions.

17. Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection (2014) Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2013-14.

18. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. (2012) Destitute and Uncertain: The Reality of Seeking Asylum in Australia.

People Exiting Prison



Darren's Story

Darren is 47 and reckons that he has spent more time homeless than housed over those years. The exception might be the time that he has spent in prison, which he has been in and out of since he was a teenager, mostly relating to his drug habit. Darren has an Acquired Brain Injury, which he thinks he developed after several assaults to the head.

Despite, or perhaps due to, a range of institutional encounters, Darren has largely avoided accessing support from the community sector. Experience has taught him to be wary of authority and he has little trust for anyone, having been burned on too many occasions. According to Darren, all prison ever taught him was how to survive prison.

“Once you get out, you’re on your own,” Darren told us. “You might be put up in a hotel or rooming house for a few weeks, then the money runs out and you’re back to your old ways again just to survive.”

Darren has had remarkable success gaining work over the years but no luck maintaining a job. He estimates that he’s worked in more than 50 places over the years but rarely for more than a couple of weeks. His longest job was three months.

Towards the end of his most recent bout of incarceration, Darren was approached by a worker from The Salvation Army’s Transit Program. They talked about what might happen to him upon release and after a few subsequent meetings, a joint plan was formed that would see Darren initially accommodated with support at the Flagstaff Crisis Accommodation Centre

with a view to moving into more permanent accommodation at the earliest opportunity. The worker picked Darren up on the day of his release to ensure that he got to Flagstaff safely.

After struggling for years with foot pain, Darren was assisted by a Salvation Army worker to see a podiatrist at a Community Health Service. Subsequently, the worker accessed some brokerage funding to help Darren buy some new shoes, which completely changed both his posture and mood.

Darren was linked into the Homelessness and Drug Dependency Program to address his substance abuse issues and provide the longer-term case management support needed to address his complex needs. After many months of waiting and extensive advocacy, Darren was able to secure transitional housing and is currently experiencing his longest stay outside of prison in 15 years.

If we really want to help people who are leaving prison to stay out of prison, we need to focus on the issues that caused them to offend in the first place.

PEOPLE EXITING PRISON FALLING THROUGH THE GAPS

Analyses of prison populations show that most offenders are not just bad people, or people who make bad choices, but come from poor, disadvantaged communities and usually have experienced some combination of family breakdown, mental illness, intellectual disability, substance abuse, disengagement from school, unemployment, poverty or homelessness.¹⁹ Whilst these experiences don't directly create or excuse criminal behaviour, they do reflect the kinds of conditions that shape people's choices and can contribute to taking negative paths.

Prisons should be an option of last resort but tough on crime policies are putting people in prison when they do not need to be. Many people, like Darren, cycle in and out of prison from a young age for ongoing struggles with addictions instead of being provided with the healthcare and support they need. For people like Darren, who also struggle with an ABI and experience homelessness, instability and unemployment, prison does not help them overcome these challenges and prepare for a new life once they are released. Unfortunately, the evidence is actually stacked against people who have spent a significant amount of time in prison. The longer a person has been in prison, the less likely they will reintegrate into society and the more likely they will offend again.²⁰ Harsher sentencing and imprisonment do not deter future crime because they ignore the foundational issues of disadvantage that often contribute to offending behaviour. If we really want to help people who are leaving prison to stay out of prison, we need to focus on the issues that caused them to offend in the first place.

KEY ISSUES IN REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION

1. The prison system is at capacity but there has been no increase in rehabilitative programs within prison.

The prison system in Victoria has experienced unprecedented growth in recent years but investment in rehabilitative programs has not kept pace. Tough on crime policies such as the removal of suspended sentencing and home detention, an increase in minimum sentences and restrictions on bail and parole eligibility have resulted in the prison population increasing 25 per cent from 2012 to 2014.²¹ In order to meet this demand, an investment of over \$1 billion in capital works has been required to expand and build new prisons.²² Unfortunately, this investment in capital works has not been met with an equal investment in programs to help rehabilitate offenders. A recent discussion paper released by the Victorian Ombudsman found that there are backlogs even for assessment by these programs and their availability is restricted.

Support programs within prison are intended to help prisoners address the reasons behind their offending, including substance abuse, mental health issues, poverty, poor literacy and numeracy or lack of vocational or living skills. The lack of investment in these programs means that people like Darren who enter our prisons are not able to address their addiction issues, gain an education or improve the skills needed to prepare for their release. As a result they exit prison no better off, and in most cases worse because prison can have a criminogenic effect and disrupts people's connection to housing, family, community and employment.²³

Approximately 51 per cent of Victorian prisoners had been in prison before and over one third of offenders are expected to return to prison within two years of being released.

19. VCOSS (2013) Myths, misinformation and missed opportunities. Insight Issue 8

20. Ritchie, D. (2011). "Does imprisonment deter? A review of the evidence." Sentencing Advisory Council

21. Victorian Ombudsman (2014) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria. Discussion paper.

22. \$670 million in 2013-14 to build a new prison and add 395 new beds and \$447.3M over 5 years (including \$131.5 million announced in 2013-14) to add over 1,000 new beds. (See The Salvation Army VSPPU response to the 2013-14 State Budget, 2013-14 Victorian Budget: Building For Growth – But Not in Human Services and the VSPPU 2014-15 Victorian State Budget Expanded Analysis)

23. Sentencing Advisory Council. (2011) Does imprisonment deter? A review of the evidence.

Given the lack of investment in support and rehabilitation programs within prisons, it is no surprise that recidivism rates in Victoria remain high. In 2013, approximately 51 per cent of Victorian prisoners had been in prison before²⁴ and over one third of offenders are expected to return to prison within two years of being released.²⁵ Victoria was once cited as the best practice example within Australia for prisoner rehabilitation.²⁶ However, while prisoner populations grow and prisons continue to become more crowded, and yet access to rehabilitative and support services simultaneously decreases, then recidivism and rehabilitation rates will only get worse.

Recommendation:

Increase investment in supportive services within prisons by a rate that matches increases in prisoner populations.

2. Inadequate pre and post release support programs.

Changes to parole access have also meant that more prisoners are being released with no supports or supervision. Recommendations from the 2013 review of the Adult Parole Board put several new restrictions on parole. While these restrictions were intended to increase accountability, they have had the unintended consequence of more prisoners being rejected for parole, serving their full sentence and then being released into the community without necessarily having participated in any rehabilitative program and without any of the restrictions or requirements placed on parolees.²⁷ The lack of rehabilitative programs and supervision of people leaving prisons raises concerns for the community's safety

and does not align with 'tough on crime' policies' goal of keeping the community safe. In fact, it would seem that tough on crime policies have actually resulted in less accountability and reduced rehabilitation for people entering into and exiting our prisons.

Tough on crime policies have actually resulted in less accountability and reduced rehabilitation for people entering into and exiting our prisons.

People leaving prison, particularly those without family, those with poor literacy and numeracy skills, issues with substance abuse, mental health or an ABI, are highly vulnerable and

at higher risk of reoffending and returning to prison. However, combined with effective support programs while in prison, pre and post release programs such as The Salvation Army's Transit Program, can help individuals understand and address the reasons for their offending behaviour and help reduce recidivism.

The Victorian Ombudsman estimates that the average prisoner serving a three year sentence costs the tax payer \$325,495.²⁸ By contrast, the Transit Program costs less than \$3,000 per person assisted. There are substantial economic, as well as social capital, savings to be made if we can keep people from returning to prison once they leave. However, despite this program's success, pre and post release programs remain scarce. It is important to invest in programs that can help prisoners prior to their release, plan for their transition back into the community as well as provide ongoing support to help them get back on their feet. Furthermore, this investment should be proportional to the overall cost of incarceration.

Recommendation:

Increase funding for pre and post release programs to equal 20 per cent of the overall prison budget.



3. Access to housing limited.

Rehabilitation programs and pre and post release support programs will be largely ineffective unless affordable and sustainable housing can be provided to ex-prisoners. Research has found that access to sustainable housing is one of the most important factors in determining the likelihood of recidivism.²⁹

Like all people experiencing disadvantage, without access to safe and sustainable housing exiting prisoners will find it difficult to address other issues in their lives which impact on their offending. Each year The Salvation Army finds housing for thousands of prisoners coming out of Port Phillip, MAP, MRC and Barwon Prisons, but all too often there is little or no ongoing support for these prisoners and accommodation options are far from ideal. Consequently, supporting exiting prisoners into appropriate housing and ensuring that they have the capacity to maintain their accommodation is a key function of pre and post release support programs such as the Transit Program. However, the systemic housing affordability crisis in Victoria makes people exiting prison particularly vulnerable to homelessness due to the stigma associated with incarceration, institutionalisation, low incomes, breaks in rental history and a lack of references needed to access private rental. The needs and vulnerabilities of people exiting prison, particularly with complex needs, such as Darren, cannot be viewed in isolation from the overall housing affordability crisis and the need for more affordable housing for those on low incomes. A multi-faceted, sustained approach to prisoner rehabilitation needs to be adopted as justice policy that includes prisoner rehabilitation while in prison, pre and post release programs to help people continue to address reasons for their offending behaviour and prevent recidivism, and supply safe and affordable housing.

Access to sustainable housing is one of the most important factors in determining the likelihood of recidivism.

Recommendation:

Follow the evidence on recidivism risks by doubling the amount of post release housing currently available to ex-prisoners.

24. Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) Prisoners in Australia 2013.

25. VCOS (2013) Myths, misinformation and missed opportunities. Insight Issue 8

26. Karen Heseltine, Rick Sarre and Andrew Day (2011) Correctional Offender Treatment Programs: the 2009 National Picture in Australia, via Victorian Ombudsman (2014) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria. Discussion paper.

27. Victorian Ombudsman (2014) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria. Discussion paper.

28. Victorian Ombudsman (2014) Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria. Discussion paper.

29. Baldry, Eileen and Desmond McDonnell, Peter Maplestone and Manu Peeters. (2004) AHURI Research and Policy Bulletin. The role of housing in preventing re-offending. Issue 36



Edward's Story

Ed is 53 and says he has lived in at least as many places as he has years. He moves in and out of homelessness and has been in prison a few times as well, though not for anything serious he tells us. A conversation with Ed is wide ranging and non-linear. It's clear that something unusual is going on for him but it's hard to put your finger on exactly what that is.

He's not on drugs right now but he admits to using a variety of substances when he can get his hands on them, mostly marijuana and speed (amphetamines). He won't touch Ice because "people go crazy on that shit". Ed's got a problem with crazy people.

In his late teens, Ed's parents took him to a doctor to try and deal with some unusual behaviours that he was exhibiting. The doctor prescribed medication but it didn't help. Ed preferred to self-medicate with illicit drugs and alcohol but his parents disagreed and by 18 he was kicked out of home. For a few months, Ed stayed with an elderly aunt who paid little attention to his comings and goings until she noticed that he was selling her belongings to pay for drugs. He's never stayed in a refuge, not wanting to be 'pinned down' but would prefer to sleep rough if he can't find anywhere else to live.

Over the years Ed has seen a series of doctors, psychiatrists, nurses and social workers, each with varying opinions about what his problem is. He's been on "heaps of meds" but none of them helped – or possibly he wasn't on them long enough to tell. Ed has no long-term connections. He moves from place to place, picking up and leaving when trouble brews and he doesn't want to deal with the consequences.

Ed came to The Salvation Army through a friend, who had been working through some similar issues and recently found a part-time job with the Salvos' help. Ed's friend first brought him along on an outing because they thought it might be good to get out of town for a change. A Salvation Army mental health worker connected with Ed on the journey to the beach and began the slow process of building rapport and trust over the next few months. Ed initially told the worker that he wasn't ready to make any big life changes but he was getting tired of moving around all the time. They agreed to begin by setting some relatively small but achievable goals and re-evaluate Ed's priorities after these have been worked through. Because Ed doesn't feel threatened by this engagement, the worker, who has experience and expertise in mental health, addictions and homelessness, is getting the best picture yet of the various challenges Ed faces, which will be critical in helping him towards a healthier and happier future.

MENTAL ILLNESS FALLING THROUGH THE GAPS

The Salvation Army works with many people like Ed every day. Their capacity to function within the community varies significantly between individuals and at different times in their lives. The common thread is that they rarely engage with mainstream systems, except at crisis points. They don't visit a GP but will eventually end up in the emergency department of a hospital. Their engagement with mental health services is usually with the CAT Team, then with police and sometimes during incarceration or hospitalisation.

Whether because of learned or inherent distrust, people like Ed reject involvement with systems that require too much of them or relationships where the sole purpose is to 'fix' them. Their primary means of positive engagement with community services has been through 'soft' entry points such as meals programs, drop-in centres, recreational activities and outreach workers. However, these entry points have been dwindling and their capacity to link people into more intensive supports when they are needed is also decreasing.

KEY ISSUES WITH OUR MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM

1. Retendering of community mental health services has made the system inflexible and ill-suited to people with complex and multiple needs.

The Salvation Army works with a significant number of people who have multiple and complex needs, including all kinds of mental health problems. Approximately 50 per cent of young people who stay in our refuges have multiple and complex needs including mental illness and substance abuse issues. In adult crisis accommodation services, like Flagstaff, the proportion is much higher, up to 80 per cent at times. However, the majority of these people do not originally come to us looking for help with their mental illness. Instead they come to our services for help with their other needs such as housing or emergency relief, an addiction or a physical health issue. It is through the course of working with them to address these issues and building relationships with them that their mental health issue becomes apparent. In many cases, the people we work with do not have a formal diagnosis for their mental illness when they access our services. In some cases, individuals may not even think they have a mental health issue at all. Community mental health services have a proven history of being able to offer flexible services that can work with individuals who have complex needs, including a mental health issue, but who may not yet have a formal diagnosis of mental illness.

Unfortunately, much of the flexibility in the community mental health sector has been lost as a result of the recent recommissioning.

The number of community mental health service providers in the state was

reduced from 150 to 30 with only three providers available in each geographic region. This has led to many clients of community mental health agencies needing to engage with a new service and new support worker. In a sector where so much success is dependent on trusting relationships being built between agencies and clients, this has led to a substantial number of people disengaging from the sector altogether. The retendering process has also redistributed money from agencies which had long histories of working with specific client populations to more generalist community mental health agencies.

Research into the relationship between homelessness and mental illness has found that 53 per cent of people experiencing both homelessness and a mental health issue developed their mental health issue after becoming homeless.

Unfortunately, this has meant people with complex needs who experience homelessness, alcohol and drug issues, ABI and mental health issues among other things, falling through the gaps as new providers struggle to build the expertise within their agencies to work with this particularly marginalised group.

Our services are also reporting that many community mental health services are now prioritising clients who have formal mental health diagnoses. For many of the people The Salvation Army works with, like Ed, the complexity of their needs and presenting issues makes it difficult to obtain a clinical diagnosis. Getting them to the access point for an assessment in the new community mental health service can be problematic as keeping appointments is difficult because of the chaotic nature of their lives. Some clients can also be aggressive as a result of their mental illness or other issues and be quite disruptive to other clients. In such circumstances, many of our clients are asked to leave and may even be banned for their behaviour. In the new system with such limited providers, being asked to leave a service significantly impacts their ability to access support.

Finally, a combination of mental health issues, substance abuse, ABI or other intellectual disability and difficult social presentations can make determining a diagnosis difficult and lead providers to conclude that a client does not have a mental health issue, or that this is not their primary problem, and that the service is therefore inappropriate for them. Unfortunately, this has meant that the individuals we work with, such as Ed who has complex needs and clearly has a mental health issue but is not diagnosed, are less able to access any kind of mental health support, community or clinical. This leaves them with very few options and puts this group of complex clients at very high risk of falling through the gaps.

The Salvation Army was pleased to note that one of Labor's election commitments was the refunding of three community mental health services that worked with this client group but were unsuccessful in the recommissioning process. Having acknowledged that this gap exists and has important ramifications for a vulnerable group of people, it is now vital that further analysis and action is taken to apply a more systemic fix across the whole of the system.

Recommendation:

Introduce a bridging funding package for those who are falling through the gaps of transitioning mental health systems.

2. Lack of housing for people with a mental illness prevents them from having the stability needed in their lives to address their mental health issue.

Sustainable, safe, affordable housing provides the security and stability for people to address other issues in their life. For people experiencing mental illness, they cannot be reasonably expected to address and manage their mental illness without a safe and sustainable place to live. Conversely, many people experiencing mental illness cannot maintain housing without ongoing mental health support. For people like Ed, each time their housing breaks down, any links with health, community services, education, training and employment are also jeopardised. Research into the relationship between homelessness and mental illness has found that 53 per cent of people experiencing both homelessness and a mental health issue developed their mental health issue after becoming homeless.³⁰

30. Chamberlain, Chris and Guy Johnson, Jacqui Theobald. (2007) RMIT Homelessness in Melbourne: Confronting the Challenge.

The relationship between homelessness and mental illness makes the need for integration between housing and mental health services a vital component of a successful system. Programs such as The Salvation Army's Oasis and SANS are examples of how integrated housing/homelessness and mental health services can help people at risk of homelessness and experiencing mental illness access and maintain their housing with ongoing mental health support. Clients of each program are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness and present with challenging behaviour stemming from a combination of issues including mental illness, substance abuse, disability, psychiatric disability and/or acquired brain injury. These programs represent the residual component of integrated homelessness and mental health services since the recommissioning. In addition to these challenges, the current reconsideration of the Commonwealth Government's role in homelessness also raises serious concerns about the homelessness sector's ability to continue working with this group of highly vulnerable people without an increase in targeted funding to meet their particular needs.

Recommendation:

Increase targeted funding to services that combine housing and mental health support, particularly for people with multiple and complex needs.

3. The introduction of the NDIS and its impact on Victorian Community Managed Mental Health Services has created additional, unintended gaps that are leaving people behind.

The Salvation Army has been heavily involved in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) pilot in the Barwon Region and has seen firsthand the impact these policy shifts have had on the community mental health sector and on the way clients can access mental health services.

Our experience of participating in the Barwon trial is that the NDIS was built with people with a disability in mind, not those with a mental illness. For example, the NDIS and the consumer-based care model operate on the assumption that people with a disability have family or a carer to help them access and navigate the system; however, many people with a mental health issue do not have these support networks. The nature of mental illness can limit a person's autonomous decision making capability and impact their ability to make informed choices that are in their best interest, therefore the assumed capacity of people to be able to navigate the system on their own behalf may not hold true in many cases for people with a mental illness. In addition, to be eligible for the NDIS you must have a 'permanent disability'. This is at odds with the principles of a recovery focused mental health service. The requirement to have a permanent disability is also problematic for people with a mental illness because of the episodic nature of mental illness and the requirement to have a formal diagnosis. Our services in the Barwon region are finding that many people with a mental illness, diagnosed or not, are not qualifying for the NDIS because they are considered not to have a permanent disability.

Unfortunately, Victoria is the only state which did not use NDIS funds to 'value add' to existing community health services, but instead used existing community mental health funds to fund the NDIS, resulting in a net loss of funding for community mental health. As a result, people with a mental health issue who do not qualify for the NDIS have no remaining services through which they can access support. The state-wide retendering of community mental health services and the reduction of service providers in the region only further exacerbates that lack of services for people like Ed who do not neatly fit into the NDIS service model. Many people with a mental illness are falling through the gaps as a result.

The Salvation Army applauds the Labor Government's commitment to continue funding for community mental health services to work with people who do not qualify for the NDIS. As we prepare for the expanded rollout of the NDIS across the state, we call on the Victorian Government to change funding arrangements for community mental health services under the NDIS and use NDIS money to 'top up' base funding for the community mental health sector. This will ensure the ongoing sustainability of the non-NDIS community mental health sector and ensure that individuals with a mental illness who are not assessed to qualify for the NDIS still have supports they can access in the community.

Recommendation:

Fully fund a Victorian recovery-oriented community mental health system for those who don't meet NDIS criteria.

Conclusion

As always, the state budget provides the Victorian Government an opportunity to increase investment to support the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our community – not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it makes both economic and social sense. This year's budget brings with it special significance as the first budget of the new Labor Government. As such, The Salvation Army would like to challenge the Labor Government to take a long-term view of the future and make investments in key programs and policies that provide a holistic approach to vulnerable individuals and their needs and address the causes of disadvantage.

This year we have focused on several areas within the service system that are becoming increasingly fragmented and increasing the gaps through which vulnerable Victorians with multiple and complex needs too often fall. We congratulate the Labor Government on a number of election commitments made that make a start in addressing these gaps. Of course there is always more to be done and a number of long standing issues remain which limit any efforts to eliminate poverty and disadvantage in our community.

Housing affordability and the lack of housing are themes that came out strongly in all of our consultations with services and have been long-term issues that impact all sectors' ability to get good outcomes for our clients. Without a safe and affordable place to live, people cannot be expected to address other issues in their lives like unemployment, needing to retrain, or a mental health or health issue. On a state level, bold reform to planning and investment in social housing is needed to ease the housing affordability crisis and open up pathways to independent living for the poor and marginalised. We also need a long-term commitment from the Commonwealth and Victorian Governments to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) as well as meaningful tax reform to address inequality and the structural causes of high housing prices.

The cost of living is another structural issue that disproportionately impacts upon those who seek assistance from The Salvation Army. As housing prices continue to increase, the costs of utilities, transport, food and education do as well. For people on low incomes, particularly those struggling to survive on income support payments, the increases in costs of living are unsustainable. We are already seeing more people at our emergency relief centres than ever before and are becoming increasingly concerned about how low income earners will make ends meet in the future.

The Salvation Army looks forward to working with the Victorian Government to address these issues through partnership and collaboration. A genuine partnership between governments and community service organisations is the only way to ensure that policies reflect the needs of the most marginalised and disadvantaged.

Highly disadvantaged people make up a small proportion of our overall community. However, how we care for these individuals remains the standard by which we can measure the success of our society. We all benefit if future policies and reforms are designed to meet the needs of the most marginalised. Indeed, it is our experience that if you can design a system that works for the most disadvantaged, it will also work for everyone else.

Summary of Recommendations

Vulnerable and Unemployed Young People

- **Extend** supports currently available to care leavers to the wider range of vulnerable young people.
- **Provide** free off-peak public transport to all health care card holders.
- **Increase** investment in TAFEs and other alternative education options to provide fundamental skills courses and practical work experience.
- **Provide** funding to support vulnerable young people to reengage in education and training options in light of the discontinued Youth Connections program.
- **Extend** flexible brokerage funding for programs like CEEP and YPRAP to continue to support young people into private rental, education and employment.

Women and Children Escaping Family Violence

- **Fully fund** services to deal with increased demand for family violence supports.
- **Increase** funding for affordable housing options including Safe At Home and Private Rental Brokerage programs to make them more widely available.
- **Fund** all family violence services to provide specialised services to children who have been affected by family violence.

Asylum Seekers

- **Extend** concessions for utilities to asylum seekers.
- **Fully fund** the cost of interpreter services for community service organisations working with asylum seekers.
- **Provide** free off-peak public transport to asylum seekers.
- **Ensure** that funding for disadvantaged students, including asylum seekers, is available regardless of what school they attend.
- **Provide** asylum seekers free access to TAFE and other vocational education options.

People Exiting Prison

- **Increase** investment in supportive services within prisons by a rate that matches increases in prisoner populations.
- **Increase** funding for pre and post release programs to equal 20 per cent of the overall prison budget.
- **Follow** the evidence on recidivism risks by doubling the amount of post release housing currently available to ex-prisoners.

People with Mental Health Issues and Complex Needs

- **Introduce** a bridging funding package for those who are falling through the gaps of transitioning mental health systems.
- **Increase** targeted funding to services that combine housing and mental health support, particularly for people with multiple and complex needs.
- **Fully fund** a Victorian recovery-oriented community mental health system for those who don't meet NDIS criteria.



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The Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (VSPPU) was established to support and resource Salvation Army services and leadership in Victoria by coordinating our response to state-wide policy issues and advocacy. Part of the VSPPU's role is to act as a central access point through which government departments, Ministers and other stakeholders are able to be directed to the appropriate people and services within The Salvation Army in Victoria. In addition, we actively participate in advocacy and policy development through written submission, social justice campaigns and collaboration with other CSO policy units and peak bodies.

For more information regarding the VSPPU or The Salvation Army in Victoria, please contact The Salvation Army Victoria Social Programme and Policy Unit (VSPPU) on 9353 5200.

We look forward to working with you.

The Salvation Army Victoria is part of The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory.

All names and identifying details used in this document have been changed.
Photos do not relate to individuals in case studies.



