

Parramatta Homelessness Interagency Minutes, 10 December 2020

Online Teams Meeting

10am – 12pm

Chairperson: Debra Ireson, Evolve Housing

Minutes: Tanya Owen/Tarina Rubis

Agenda item	Discussion
1. Welcome & Acknowledgment of Country	Deb Ireson welcomed everyone and acknowledged the traditional owners of the land, the Darug people, and paid respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present.
2. Welcome & Introduction	Record of attendance provided after minutes
3. Previous Minutes	October Minutes confirmed – Debra Ireson and Anjali Roberts
4. Business Arising	N/A
5. Guest Speaker Nishadh Rego, Advocacy and Policy Manager, Jesuit Refugee Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are about 102-103,000 people seeking asylum in Australia. The Federal Government has applied policy frameworks to different cohorts of people based on their method of arrival – including the status determination process they go through. Amongst plane arrivals, about 36,000 who have applied for protection and awaiting decisions/review of decision by Department of Home Affairs (DHA). About 17,000 of these are in NSW. • Of those who arrived by boat before 2014/2015, known as the ‘legacy caseload’, about 5000 people still going through decision/review process. Approx. 2000 of these people now have expired bridging visas, and are therefore living in community with no status, rights, access to support. Another 500 people recently exited from Community Detention are additional to these figures. • There is an additional group of people who have had claims rejected, but there is a huge backlog for judicial review of decision, over 60,000 in this category nationally. • Access to legal status, work rights, Medicare etc varies considerably across cohorts – in part because of the different policy regimes layered over each other over the years. Also case of Min HA and Min Immigration – hold significant personal administrative power, can make/override decisions on case by case basis. • Situation has been exacerbated by COVID, with significant job losses and reduction in hours for people seeking asylum. Melbourne Uni estimated 19000 refugees/asylum seekers would lose jobs from pandemic. JRS has seen 47% people in their employment program have lost jobs or significant reduction in hours. In the absence of a safety net (not eligible for JobSeeker/JobKeeper and Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) access has been constricted further), the Fed Govt has allocated \$13m emergency financial relief to all temporary visa holders

	<p>(TVHs), i.e. \$13m available for 1.4 million eligible people. There are significant backlogs because of significant demand.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are consequences for housing and homelessness. A Red Cross report mapping challenges of people who've accessed emergency relief has shown that debt, rental arrears and rough sleeping are common impacts. • Advocacy at the federal level has been channelled through the Nobody Left Behind Campaign, calling for TVHs to be given time limited access to be given additional support during pandemic and recovery phase. • 4 challenges identified with this: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heard from DSS and Min that they are not seeing quantitative evidence of scale of need at national level. But there is no one source of federal, state, civil society and diaspora support so it is very difficult to present the complete picture. Communities are also providing informal support. 2. There is opposition to the concept of welfare payments for TVHs. So the campaign has shifted the frame of advocacy to emergency relief, but this is not going to support people in the medium-long term. 3. Dollar amounts that Federal Govt was willing to allocate could not be too large or visible in budget. But it was difficult to identify highly vulnerable people through particular criteria within 1.4m TVHs. The Fed Govt did not want to identify people seeking asylum for specific assistance. 4. Appropriateness and relevance of the goal. Moving into recovery phase, the emergency relief focus is not going to solve longer term issues, e.g. employment • Campaign is now at a crossroads in terms of advocacy. This is a permanent emergency for people seeking asylum. There is recognition that State Govts have stepped in to varying degrees. • How can the Interagency support advocacy efforts? There is a role for place based research and analysis regarding what we are seeing on the ground. Who's coming to services, what situation are they in and what challenges are there in providing services? A paper could give Govts a snapshot of regional challenges (recognising that categorisation of people across the various cohorts is challenging). • Representations to Minister Lee (Min for Multicultural Affairs and local member) could be useful. Important for him and others to hear from a collective of agencies outside the refugee/asylum seeker sector. • There is work ongoing with DCJ and Multicultural NSW to understand the housing and homelessness trajectories of people seeking asylum. Input from Interagency members would be helpful ahead of a submission to DCJ. How are people presenting, what are their key issues, why are agencies not able to support them? What additional support do we need to assist them? • Members agreed to work early in the new year (Feb/March) to collect data on impacts for service providers. Debra Ireson (Evolve) and David Nutting (Amelie Housing) to work with Council (Tarina/Tanya) to deliver this. • Issue of consent was raised in relation to collecting client data. However it was reinforced that the angle to be taken is on impacts/challenges for service providers rather than individuals.
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6. Guest Speaker

Margaret Brickwood,
Manager Asylum Seeker
Services, Settlement Services
International

- The Status Resolution Support Services program provides a welfare payment to people seeking asylum if they are not working. However since 2018, the policy of Department of Home Affairs is that it is not seen as a welfare program. Rather, it is expected that asylum seekers will work in the community if they have capacity to do so, regardless of whether they are employed or not. To receive SRSS payments, scientific demonstration of barriers to employment is required.
- It is becoming increasingly difficult to keep people on the program and SSI is not able to continue providing support if they are exited from the SRSS program.
- COVID has resulted in many job losses across industries impacted by the pandemic. In this situation asylum seekers don't have actual barriers to employment.
- There are also challenges when bridging visas expire as they are no longer automatically renewed – without reapplying, work rights are also lost. Important that people are advised to reapply for bridging visas if services come across people who have expired visas, as they may not always receive the notification. Contact RACS.
- 800 people approached SSI in March-May seeking support following loss of employment. 10% of these were eligible to reapply for SRSS. SSI advocated to Multicultural NSW for emergency relief funding which has supported some in this cohort.
- There are 3 non-funded service providers who used to support the cohort with a finally determined visa status. These providers were overstretched prior to COVID, now more so. The Minister decided to sign off on final departure visas for people in community detention in Aug/Sept 2020. This applied to 77 people in NSW, some of whom had been in detention system for 7 year. Although they had no visa in community detention, they were particularly vulnerable and provided with supported accommodation and income support. Since release from community detention, they are now expected to function within the private rental market, with no rental or work history in Australia. Weekly meetings with SSI, Life without Barriers and the non-funded services (JRW, House of Welcome, Asylum Seeker Centre) have been coordinated to ensure they don't become homeless. However, people in this cohort may begin to present at mainstream homelessness services.
- It was noted that community housing providers with affordable housing programs (not social housing) may be able to assist with a softer entry to the private housing/rental market. Clients would need to be working and could access rentals subsidised by about 20%. **Debra Ireson and Maggie to discuss offline.**
- Some of the current cohort of SRSS recipients have been receiving support for over 7 years. Now some are being exited on the basis they have been receiving support for this long, regardless of barriers to employment. Exits are continuing. This group cannot go on housing waiting lists. SSI would also be interested to hear about how many asylum seekers are approaching homelessness services.

7. Government/Service Updates

DHEG, Simone Halaby

- Held first meeting with new membership group 24 Nov, next is Feb.
- After each meeting, communications on key topics discussed will be sent. Encouraging sector to make contact with portfolio leads, to raise issues at the meeting.
- Hoping for more meetings from the start of new year. Issues can also be emailed to the general group.

LIAC

- No report

Collaborative Youth Services Partnership, Debra Ireson

- Back up and running since COVID pause. Will be more to report soon.

2021 Street Count (Simone Halaby DCJ and Fay Edwards CoP)

- Expression of Interest has gone out to sector inviting participants from homelessness services. Hoping to have SHS providers involved. EOI Due 18 December to DCJ.
- Count will be on 22 Feb, overnight. Focusing on Penrith LGA, Parramatta LGA, Cumberland LGA, and Blacktown Mt Druitt areas.
- City of Parramatta has been coordinating with DCJ and local providers to conduct the street count. Feel free to email Fay Edwards if have any questions. Information flyer to be shared next year.

Services Australia, Lauren Ryan

- Members invited to share any info of benefit to vulnerable customers with Lauren to distribute to her community engagement network. Mailbox is csw.ceoassistance@servicesaustralia.com.au
- Coronavirus supplement has reduced to \$250/fortnight now, but will reduce again to \$150 from 31 Dec-31 March. No further info in terms of extending that. Recommend to advise clients to budget in order to mitigate impact of these changes.
- Pause on debt recovery has ceased as of Feb 2021.
- Public holiday reporting – visit SA website to see reporting dates.
- New crisis payment available for humanitarian entrants – newly arrived in Australia.

City of Parramatta Council, Tarina Rubis

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gauging interest in sector training on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Awareness/Competency. Evolve Housing and Parramatta Community Corrections interested.
8. Strategic Issues: a) Asylum seekers/temporary visa holders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As discussed during guest presentations.
9. Other Business	<p>a) Homes for Heroes, Jacqui Leonard Homes for Heroes is a service for veterans. There are about 6000 homeless veterans at the moment, one in five are women. This is a particularly vulnerable cohort. Identifying vets is difficult, as they often don't recognise or disclose that they are eligible for special concessions. Jacqui is keen to provide further details of service to Interagency.</p> <p>b) Future Guest Speakers Topic suggestion: International students and impacts of COVID. Potential speakers from WSU and Turbans 4 Australia.</p> <p>c) Meeting format Proposed to alternate/mix meeting formats between in person and online. Will aim for Feb meeting in person, if covid restrictions allow.</p>
10. Next Meeting	Meeting closed at 11:25am <p style="text-align: center;">Next meeting: 18 February 2021, 10:00am – 12:00pm</p>

Attendance

Name	Agency/Service	In attendance	Apologies
Margaret Brickwood	SSI	Y	
Debra Ireson	Evolve Housing for Youth	Y	
Janine Tomkins	Mission Australia	Y	
Jamie Alford	High Street Youth	Y	
Jeremy Sleiman	Big Issue	Y	
Simone Halaby	DCJ Homelessness	Y	
Julian Jeyakumar		Y	
David Nutting	Amelie Housing	Y	
Julie Tai	Parramatta Community Corrections	Y	
Laurie Besant	Hope Hostel	Y	
Mouly Pasupathipillai	SSI	Y	
Jacqui Leonard	Homes for Heroes	Y	
Tanya Owen	City of Parramatta	Y	
Jarad Weston	City of Parramatta	Y	
Anjali Roberts	Jesuit Refugee Service	Y	
Nishadh Rego	Jesuit Refugee Service	Y	
Tarina Rubis	City of Parramatta	Y	
Lauren Ryan	DHS Centrelink	Y	
Indri Windyasari	Parramatta Mission	Y	
Maeve Brown	JRS		Y
Viliami Tuipulotu	Wesley Mission		Y