

**Report of a Community Conversation about
Homelessness and Affordable Housing
in the Augusta-Margaret River Shire**

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Compiled by Margaret River Soup Kitchen, Margaret River Professional Social Workers Collective and community members from the Community Conversation.

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INTRODUCTION

Housing is a human right, and connects to numerous social justice issues. The Australian Council of Social Services states,

‘Housing provides a foundation for economic and social participation. It promotes stable and healthy households and sustainable communities. The lack of stable and secure housing causes poor health, education and employment outcomes and increases poverty and social exclusion’¹.

In April 2015, the Augusta-Margaret River (AMR) Shire Council released a draft *Affordable Housing Strategy* for community comment. After writing a submission outlining local issues of homelessness, the Margaret River Soup Kitchen hosted a community conversation between community members and Council leaders to discuss homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire.

The Community Conversation was held on 25 May 2015 at the Margaret River Soup Kitchen, with support from the Margaret River Professional Social Workers Collective. It was an opportunity for community members who previously or currently experience difficulties accessing affordable and appropriate housing to dialogue directly with Council decision-makers and support greater community participation in the development of the *Affordable Housing Strategy*. In small groups, participants discussed key issues regarding homelessness and access to affordable housing, and ideas for Council to address these issues in its *Strategy*. This was a safe and open forum for community members to share their stories and inform local policy.

This report shares the key discussion points from the community conversation. It includes:

- Background information about homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire.
- Key issues regarding homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire.
- Community ideas for Council to address homelessness and unaffordable housing in the Shire.

The issues and ideas presented in this report are not necessarily the opinions of the Margaret River Soup Kitchen or the Margaret River Professional Social Workers Collective. This document is a record of the diversity of opinions at the community conversation and is intended to inform Council’s strategies to address homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire.

BACKGROUND

This section provides background information regarding the Margaret River Soup Kitchen and Margaret River Professional Social Workers Collective, and homelessness and affordable housing the AMR Shire, drawing from available research, the Margaret River Soup Kitchen submission and the draft *Affordable Housing Strategy*.

Community organisations involved in this Community Conversation

Margaret River Soup Kitchen was established in 1995, and is a community service based at the Margaret River Community Resource Centre. It provides healthy, affordable or free dinners to between 80 and 150 community members every Monday and Wednesday evening. It is run by a diverse group of volunteers who are employed, long-term unemployed, backpackers, people who have previously experienced social justice difficulties such as homelessness, and people with disabilities and their carers.

The Margaret River Professional Social Work Collective was formed in 2014, and is a collective of qualified social workers and social work students that reside in the AMR Shire. Social work is a values-based profession, and the core values of social work are respect for persons, human rights, social justice, and professional integrity. The Collective currently comprises approximately ten members who work in diverse areas such as counselling, youth, women's human rights, mental health, corrective services, spiritual health and wellbeing. The collective engages in professional networking, community advocacy and professional development.

Homelessness

Homelessness is a relatively hidden but serious issue in the AMR Shire, indicated by various recent media storiesⁱⁱ. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines 'homelessness' as follows:

'When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations'ⁱⁱⁱ.

The *2011 Census* found that in Australia, 105,237 people enumerated in the Census were classified as being homeless on Census night, up from 89,728 in 2006^{iv}. Classifications of homelessness include:

- Persons who are in improvised dwellings, tents or sleepers out;
- Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless;
- Persons staying temporarily with other households;
- Persons staying in boarding houses;
- Persons in other temporary lodging; and,
- Persons living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.

In Western Australia^v, 37.5 persons per 10,000 people were homeless on 2011 Census night, a total of 9,592 persons (4,236 females and 5,356 males). Another 1,235 persons were marginally housed in caravan parks. In particular, 2,297 persons classified as homeless were aged 12-24 years (1,085 females and 1,194 males). It is suggested that these figures most likely underestimate the actual rates of homelessness^{vi}, as an Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report^{vii} found that in 2013-2014, 254,001 persons in Australia received assistance from specialist homelessness agencies, with a rate of approximately 80 clients per 10,000 people in WA. Females had a higher rate of service use than males.

On the 2011 census night, 25 persons who completed the Census were homeless in Margaret River, and 12 persons who completed the Census were homeless in Augusta^{viii}. The total figure of 37 people who were homeless on 2011 Census night in the AMR Shire is most likely a statistical under-representation of homelessness in the Shire, due to the difficulties in accessing people who are homeless to accurately reflect the real rate of homelessness, and local population increase since 2011.

Margaret River Community Resource Centre (MRCRC) client statistics also show high levels of homelessness in the AMR Shire. In the 2013-2014 financial year, 31 people with 'no fixed address' sought assistance such as food vouchers from the MRCRC, 20 of whom were staying temporarily at local caravan parks or were backpackers. By April 2015, 43 people with 'no fixed address' have already sought assistance from the MRCRC in the 2014-2015 financial year, of whom two were staying in local caravan parks and one was a backpacker.

'No fixed address' indicates that these people's living situation would most likely reflect the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of homelessness.

In Australia, homelessness is related to numerous social issues, including domestic violence, a shortage of affordable housing, unemployment, mental illness and other health concerns, family breakdown, crime and drug and alcohol misuse^{ix}.

Emergency housing

There is no supported or emergency accommodation for people experiencing homelessness in the AMR Shire. This includes no emergency supported accommodation for women and children, including those experiencing domestic violence. The South West women's refuges (located in Busselton and Bunbury) do not accept homelessness as a reason for offering supported accommodation to women. Woman (and their children) must be leaving a domestic violence situation to be considered eligible for admission.

People experiencing homelessness in the AMR Shire often contact the Margaret River Soup Kitchen and MRCRC for assistance. These agencies provide support where possible, including financial support to assist with rental costs, financial support for temporary accommodation at a local backpackers lodge, purchasing of a tent, or lending of a caravan by the Margaret River Soup Kitchen. However, local caravan parks and backpacker lodges generally do not accept persons requiring emergency accommodation when referred by the Margaret River Soup Kitchen.

The Margaret River Soup Kitchen owns four caravans and is trialling a program to lend caravans to people experiencing homelessness to provide temporary accommodation. All caravans are currently in use by community members. Margaret River Soup Kitchen estimate that in the past two years, caravans have been lent out ten times and tents have been purchased twice. The organisation estimates a gendered split of 60% men/40% women amongst those who request to use this service.

Affordable housing

Lack of affordable housing is a social justice issue and is directly connected to homelessness. The Australian Association of Social Workers states,

'Social workers in acute health and corrections settings involved in discharge planning also regularly report that many of their clients remain for longer periods than required or are discharged into absolute homelessness due to the unavailability of affordable housing. This can also occur when young people leave state care. The result is a cycling through services, temporary accommodation, and homelessness for many of these clients'.^x

The AMR Council's draft *Affordable Housing Strategy* identifies several issues regarding affordable access to housing in AMR Shire. For example, the *Strategy* highlights a high median rent of \$400 per week (a 44% increase since 2011), and a median family income of \$1,327 per week. Furthermore, the *Strategy* notes that in 2011, 26.2% of renters in the households receiving the bottom 40% of incomes in our Shire spent more than 30% of their income on housing in Margaret River. There is a rental price to income ratio of 8.4 in the AMR Shire (equivalent to Melbourne), which is well above the national average of 5.5. Additionally, cost of living in the AMR Shire is significant due to lack of public transport and high food and fuel costs.

Some community members experience circumstances that are exacerbated by lack of affordable housing, such as 'women and children who are unable to leave situations of domestic violence, parents who face interminable delays when seeking to be reunified with their children, and people unable to leave temporary accommodation services due to the unavailability of more permanent accommodation'.^{xi} People receiving social security benefits are also marginalised from accessing affordable housing. For example, Newstart Allowance is a maximum of \$519.20 per fortnight for a single person with no children, and a maximum of \$561.80 for a single person with dependent children. With a median weekly rent of \$400 in Margaret River, it is impossible for persons on Newstart to privately rent a home. Furthermore, we observe that in times of high demand and low housing supply, real estate agencies are less likely to privately rent a house to persons receiving Newstart or other social security benefits due to the low income and lack of income security.

Additionally, it is perceived that low-waged seasonal and temporary workers experience difficulty accessing affordable housing. Margaret River Soup Kitchen is aware of numerous temporary workers who 'illegally' camp in their cars to meet their accommodation needs due to the lack of affordable short-term housing in the Shire and low incomes received for casual work. In peak season (summer and autumn), Margaret River Soup Kitchen estimates that approximately 40-50 backpackers attend the Soup Kitchen each evening for meals.

The draft *Affordable Housing Strategy* also indicates that there are 112 public housing homes in the AMR Shire, and on 2011 census night, 220 households earned less than the maximum income threshold for public housing. It is clear that available public housing is significantly inadequate to address housing affordability and homelessness in our Shire. Margaret River Soup Kitchen and Margaret River Professional Social Workers Collective are aware of a 5-8 year waitlist for general Department of Housing public housing in the Shire, and that persons with public housing priority (such as women experiencing domestic violence) will not be provided a home in the AMR Shire, which forces local persons on the Department priority list to move away from their community. Department of Housing can provide bond assistance to support low income people to access rental accommodation.

There are a few self-managed housing collectives in the AMR Shire, such as the Whole Earth Collective on Samworth St. The Collective buildings were funded by the State Government but the collective is self-managed with regular meetings. Rent is calculated as 25% of household income up to a certain amount, after which tenants pay market rent. Rent is collected by the collective and used to maintain the homes. This is an affordable and empowering policy response that requires minimal government engagement after the initial investment of building the homes.

The Australian Association of Social Workers highlights that shortages in affordable housing affect the health, educational, employment, and emotional well being of individuals and families, which impacts both current and future wellbeing and life-chances.^{xii} Equitable access to affordable housing is a priority for a thriving, sustainable and socially just community.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

On Monday 25 May 2015, the Margaret River Soup Kitchen hosted a dialogue between community members and AMR Shire Councilors and Council staff to discuss the issues of homelessness and affordable housing. The dialogue was attended by 38 people, including 3 Councilors (1 female, 2 male), 5 Council staff (1 female, 4 male) and 30 community members (16 female, 14 male).

The dialogue involved moderated small group discussions to discuss two key questions:

- What are the issues of homelessness and affordable housing in the Shire?
- What are your ideas for how Council can address these issues?

Small group moderators took notes during the discussion, which were then collated and presented in this report. The report shares the community dialogue findings using the language of participants.

Issues of homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire

The five discussion groups identified numerous issues of homelessness and lack of affordable housing in the AMR Shire.

Homelessness

The discussion groups recognized that homelessness in the AMR Shire is a complex issue with multiple causes and co-existing issues such as upbringing, mental and physical, health drug and alcohol misuse, family violence, unemployment, low income, education and high cost of living. It affects men, younger men, women, younger women, and single parents which children (generally women). Homelessness is also linked to unaffordability of housing. For example, some attendees mentioned that people working in local industries receive wages less than award rates due to an influx of seasonal workers. This can also lead to lack of access to employment and inability to afford housing.

The discussion groups highlighted that homelessness in the AMR Shire is experienced in multiple ways by diverse peoples such as people with mental health issues, women leaving domestic violence situations, unemployed people, backpackers and others. Homelessness experiences may include camping or living in caravans, sleeping in cars, 'couch surfing' for temporary accommodation, overcrowding in share houses and 'drifting'. One participant explained that they had encountered some community members asking for money in town, which was a manifestation of homelessness and high cost of living.

Discussion groups explained that there is 'nowhere in AMR Shire for people experiencing homelessness to go'. Some people explained that insecurity and instability of housing and constantly moving is stressful, particularly with other responsibilities such as work and schooling. Some people feel embarrassment about experiencing homelessness.

Currently, there is community dependence on local groups to address homelessness with no overall community approach or strategy. Attendees also perceived risks for community members supporting people experiencing homelessness, although the risks were not specified.

Emergency accommodation

Every discussion group noted that there is no crisis or emergency accommodation in the AMR Shire. The Shire does not have a boarding house for short-term crisis accommodation or a women's refuge. Margaret River Soup Kitchen and MRCRC may provide grassroots support with food, clothing and caravans if available, although caravans are only a medium-term option. One discussion group highlighted that it is not obvious where community members can access help. The MRCRC is available but is insufficient.

Caravan and camping accommodation

Some attendees shared that they live in caravans on private properties or caravan parks. Living in a caravan park is short-term only and is expensive – one participant pays \$196/week to live in a Margaret River Soup Kitchen caravan in a caravan park. She said this is ‘not an affordable option’. Another group quoted that unpowered tent sites in caravan parks cost \$14 per night / \$170 per week. Long-term caravan park residents are influenced by tourism zoning.

Margaret River Soup Kitchen has four caravans that it lends to community members in need. Some people are able to stay in a caravan park, but caravan parks don’t accept people with mental health or drug and alcohol issues. A family who has been living in a caravan for at least a year said, ‘we would like to be in a house’. Furthermore, the caravan option is difficult if a person does not have a car or available land to place the caravan.

Long-term living in a caravan has social ramifications. One participant who is living in a caravan shared that his children cannot visit him because he does not have room for them. A high school student living in a caravan with their mother explained that they cannot invite their friends over to visit, saying ‘I want my own space’. Additionally, the teenager cannot walk around the park at night because it is ‘dark and dangerous’.

Social housing

All discussion groups said that there is a significant lack of social housing in the AMR Shire. Furthermore, the waiting period for Department of Housing is very long. One woman has been on the list for 3 years and is living in a caravan in a caravan park. There are also very few new Department of Housing homes being constructed in the community.

Private renting

Every discussion group recognized that renting is difficult in the AMR Shire. Current market rent is very high. One participant said that housing prices in AMR Shire were comparable to Sydney and quoted that his share house of three people costs \$545/week. Another participant said, ‘the property market is locked up’. A Council staff member explained that rent prices in the AMR Shire have been high for 20 years.

Some participants felt that high fly-in fly-out (FIFO) mining wages received by some community members have driven up rental prices. Additionally, it is hard for people receiving low incomes to compete with people with high wages when rental properties are available. One participant said she felt intimidated when applying to rent a house and competing with FIFO workers. Discussion groups also highlighted seasonal issues with renting, whereby rental rates are higher during the tourist season (summer) when there are fewer housing options.

Discussion groups explained that there is a shortage of rental accommodation and it is highly competitive as many people apply for houses. High demand drives up rental prices. One group mentioned that there is high demand to rent units in the town centre and a participant quoted a rental price of \$300/week for a 1-bedroom unit. A Council staff member explained that Council is committed to higher density housing in the centre of town, to which his group highlighted these houses are often more expensive to rent and buy. Some groups also mentioned that there are many vacant houses with absentee

landowners (holiday houses) in the AMR Shire. There are also many empty houses due to FIFO workers being away for work.

Discussion groups also shared that high cost of rent is often not affordably relative to average income. Lack of affordable rent is compounded with other high living costs in the AMR Shire, such as telephone and internet, food, household bills, difficulty finding employment (particularly for young people), the insecure seasonal nature of local employment and lack of public transport. Some groups also noted that seasonal vineyard workers often cannot afford to rent a home in the AMR Shire. Some people are able to work for rent as Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOFers), but this is temporary and usually located out of the town centre. Some groups mentioned that backpackers stay in their vans at Margaret River Rotary Park because there is a lack of affordable rental properties.

One participant felt that 'a lot of people used to be nice' in Margaret River as everyone knew each other and would help with accommodation or a place to park a caravan – but now the town has grown bigger and these social bonds have weakened. He said, 'now it is all about money'.

Discussion groups also discussed other issues regarding private renting:

- It is difficult for low-income people to access the deposit and bond amount required to rent a house.
- There is limited diversity of housing stock in the community.
- Some people mentioned that they would share housing with others if available, but sharehousing with children is difficult.
- One participant said, 'If you rent you can't get ahead' financially.

Purchasing a home

A discussion group explained that owning your own home is the 'Aussie dream', but it is not accessible for many people due to increased prices of land. Another group said that there is vacant land in the AMR Shire but houses are not being built – it is a 'slow market'.

Ideas for how AMR Shire Council can address these issues

Council has a key role in addressing homelessness and housing affordability in the AMR Shire. As one participant said, 'Council can be more active' about these issues. Another group highlighted that 'Council needs to facilitate it but not do it'. All discussion groups said that the AMR Shire Council's *Affordable Housing Strategy* should address short term/emergency housing, medium term housing and long-term housing needs. There cannot be one solution for all, and management is a critical issue. One group also highlighted that housing solutions should be connected to systems we already have in the community.

The discussion groups identified many creative solutions to address issues of homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire.

Emergency accommodation

Discussion groups said that emergency accommodation should be a priority for the AMR Shire in the *Affordable Housing Strategy*. Council strategies can include the following:

- Work with the State government and local community organisations to develop and fund a boarding house or temporary shelter for emergency accommodation, such as a big share house and/or a place for mobile homes with overflow camping to suit diverse options.
- Provide logistical, financial and lobbying support for the development of a local women's refuge or help facilitate greater community access to the Busselton and Bunbury refuges.
- Support Soup Kitchen's caravan program by:
 - Providing space in Council-owned caravan parks in Augusta for low-income people and people needing emergency accommodation to stay in the park for affordable rent [Note: affordable and consistent public transport to access Margaret River will also be required].
 - Allocating public land in Margaret River and Cowaramup for emergency housing caravans with services such as bathrooms, kitchen and laundry.
 - Encouraging community members to provide space for caravans on their private property with Council support such as access to public liability insurance, relaxed rates for larger properties, and grants to construct services such as bathrooms, kitchen and laundry.
 - Financially support the purchase and maintenance of caravans for the Soup Kitchen program.
- Create and maintain a register of houses available for emergency accommodation.

Social housing

The discussion groups want Council to have a key role in increasing social housing in the AMR Shire. It was suggested that Council strategies can include:

- Work with Department of Housing to allocate more social housing to the AMR Shire, with diverse housing to address multiple needs. This includes being creative about housing options in the community, such as:
 - Fund more housing collectives.
 - Construct more housing on existing Department properties.
 - Provide housing in ex-mining dongas and other recycled options.
- Work with Department of Housing to develop appropriate styles of accommodation in appropriate places throughout the Shire.
- Donate land to Department of Housing or make more land available for social housing, including community-managed housing collectives.
- Work with Department of Housing to increase the capacity of existing social housing by redeveloping existing homes and using Department land more efficiently.

Housing collectives

Housing collectives such as the Whole Earth Collective were considered an empowering and effective strategy to address homelessness and affordable housing. The Whole Earth collective is self-supporting and a good use of land (high density). Council strategies may include:

- Work with Department of Housing, community organisations such as Access Housing, local community groups and community members to 'reinvent' the group housing settlement scheme by developing local housing collectives.

- Provide financial and planning assistance and public land to community groups to develop housing collectives.
- Encourage and incentivize developers to construct affordable housing collectives.
- Expand zoning options to more easily enable flexible and diverse housing collectives.

Private renting

Discussion groups believed that Council can and should influence the private rental market in the AMR Shire by encouraging and incentivizing lower rental prices. Groups highlighted that short-term and long-term rentals are required for long-term residents as well as backpackers and visitors. Council strategies can include:

- Develop and maintain a documented structure of affordable rent prices in AMR Shire and encourage, incentivize and regulate property owners and real estate agencies to charge fair rent prices.
- Incentivize absentee landowners to rent out their holiday homes (at affordable rent prices) with models such as families renting the property for 11 months and then vacationing for one month when the property owners holiday in the AMR Shire.
- Provide rates discount for people who open up their home and granny flat for affordable, long-term housing for low-income people (with means-testing to ensure low-income people rent the homes).
- Increase rates for absentee landowners unless they rent out their home for affordable rates for long-term rental.
- Lobby State Government to expand access to Department of Housing financial assistance for low-income people to apply for private rental housing (such as no interest loans for deposit and bond etc).
- Work with wineries to provide affordable accommodation for seasonal and temporary workers, with 'wineries taking responsibility of employment'.
- Change regulations regarding how many people can share a home to house more people.

Housing development

Groups identified that high rental prices are related to high demand and lack of diverse housing stock. As a result, new housing is required, but should be developed with affordability, sustainability and flexibility as key priorities. Suggested strategies for Council to support affordable housing development include:

- Work with developers and Department of Housing to develop affordable and social housing in housing developments with approaches such as:
 - Encourage and incentivize developers to construct affordable housing.
 - Support the development of self-contained granny flats on existing properties with enough bedrooms for a small family.
 - Encourage and incentivize developers to work with community members to develop affordable collective housing initiatives.
- Require greater diversity of housing in new housing developments.
- Require that housing developers integrate affordable housing into new developments by:
 - Allocating a certain percentage of land being for affordable housing, including contributing land to Council for social housing.

- Providing low-cost blocks of land for low-income people to purchase (with means-tested purchasing).
- Providing affordable rental housing and including and supporting housing collectives in developments.
- Apportioning a sizeable developer contribution towards social housing, either as a levy or land (a suggested percentage was 10% of land or value of development).
- Mandating sustainable housing requirements that reduce cost of living, such as smaller house sizes, solar panels, grey water systems, water tanks, walkability and cycle access.
- Including long-term leases on affordable blocks and housing collectives for low-income community members.
- Regulate caveats on new housing developments by mandating:
 - No minimum housing size to allow smaller houses to be built.
 - No requirements for closed garage and other costly (and unsustainable) features to reduce construction costs.
 - No restrictions on housing style to allow flexible and affordable options such as transportable houses, shipping container homes, tiny houses and sustainable homes.
- Change building regulations so that developers can build homes that are cheap to rent.
- Encourage rural landowners to develop low cost housing on rural properties rather than chalets and holiday accommodation.
- Encourage owner/builder housing development with co-operative labour.
- Encourage and incentivize the development of 'tiny houses' (low impact, very small houses).
- Make low-interest loans available for low-income people to build affordable houses.
- Simplify planning processes for affordable and small houses.
- Support low-income people to build their own homes on affordable blocks or in collective housing, with incentives such as reduced rates, loans and grants.

One group highlighted that this is a good time to take action in the AMR Shire as there are five or six subdivisions coming up, with potential for affordable housing and social housing expansion.

AMR housing officer

There is no local housing organization or service in the AMR Shire. As such, community members must access limited services in Busselton for support, which is particularly difficult with lack of public transport and limited information. Several groups suggested that Council work with local community organisations to develop a local housing officer position to assist / coordinate people to find short and long-term accommodation. This position could be jointly funded by AMR Council, State government and local organisations such as Margaret River Soup Kitchen. This position could:

- Provide information to community members.
- Provide short-term immediate support to people experiencing housing crisis.
- Advocate for community members to access social housing and private rental.
- Lead regular community monitoring and research about homelessness and affordable housing.

One group highlighted that not everyone seeking affordable housing needs case management but just requires information and advocacy to access appropriate housing.

Policy lobbying

AMR Council has a key role in lobbying State and Federal governments to address local issues relating to homelessness and affordable housing. Council can work with local organizations and community members to lobby for:

- Funding for emergency housing in the AMR Shire, such as the conversion of a few Department of Housing homes into emergency accommodation and/or the development of a boarding house and women's refuge.
- Increased number of Department of Housing homes in the AMR Shire with diverse housing styles in appropriate locations (particularly the centre of town).
- Funding and development of community-owned housing collectives.
- Expanding housing options on existing Department of Housing properties.
- Financial assistance for low-income people to engage in private rent.
- State government planning regulations for developer contribution of land for social housing and affordable housing.
- Sustainable housing regulations with renewable energy, rainwater catchment, appropriate solar design and sustainable building materials to reduce living costs.
- Funding for a housing officer in the AMR Shire.
- Reduced/exempted capital gains tax to encourage property owners to sell low cost housing.

Community engagement and collaboration

The issues of homelessness and affordable housing require a whole-of-community response. Council can take a lead role in this response with the following strategies:

- Work with local organisations and community members to support increased community awareness-raising of the issues of homelessness and affordable housing. This may include:
 - Supporting and encouraging community members to share stories relating to homelessness and affordable housing.
 - Supporting the development of safe spaces for dialogue between community members and between community members and Council about homelessness and affordable housing.
 - Working with local organisations, schools and community members to generate discussion and awareness-raising about homelessness and affordable housing through creative thinking 'outside the box'. One idea is a 'creative competition' for community members to develop new ideas to address the issues.
 - Helping develop social consciousness about homelessness and affordable housing for landlords and real estate agencies, encouraging them to 'not be greedy about high rents'.
- Work with local organisations (such as the Council Community Network Group) and affected community members to develop a holistic community response to issues that lead to homelessness.
- Lead the development of a local working group to collaboratively develop, implement and monitor the above-mentioned strategies to address homelessness and affordable housing in the AMR Shire. The working group could involve:
 - Margaret River Soup Kitchen and MRCRC.
 - Margaret River Professional Social Workers Collective.
 - Department of Housing.

- LAMP and other relevant organisations.
- Local community groups such as Lions, Rotary and CWA.
- Community members with experience or insight into homelessness, affordable housing issues and collective housing.
- Housing developers.
- Real estate agencies.
- Work with local community organizations to collate, update and provide information about available housing services.
- Continue monitoring the issues of homelessness and affordable housing with ongoing local research and community dialogues.

CONCLUSION

This report provides community-based insight into the issues of homelessness and unaffordable housing in the AMR Shire. It shares issues and ideas from community members in dialogue with Council staff and Councillors. As a form of participatory governance, the community conversation and the report are important contributions to the Council's *Affordable Housing Strategy*.

The community conversation ended with a recommendation that Council and Margaret River Soup Kitchen organize a community forum *prior* to approving the updated version of the *Affordable Housing Strategy*. In this forum, Council could share the proposed strategies and hear feedback from community members to finalise the document. This could enable greater community ownership of the *Strategy* and increased community commitment to working with Council to address issues of homelessness and affordable housing.

ENDNOTES

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^{vii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014, *Specialist homelessness services: 2013–2014. Cat. no. HOU 276*, AIHW, Canberra.

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^x Australian Association of Social Workers 2008, *Housing Affordability Position Statement*, Australian Association of Social Workers, Canberra.

^{xi} Australian Association of Social Workers 2008

^{xii} Australian Association of Social Workers 2008