



Understanding and addressing homelessness and crisis accommodation in Augusta Margaret River

Results of community consultation activities undertaken by Just Home Margaret River Inc to inform the Shire of Augusta Margaret River's Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy

Just Home Margaret River Inc

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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
1 INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1 Background.....	4
1.2 Just Home Margaret River.....	4
2 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE	5
2.1 Community workshops.....	5
2.2 One-to-one discussions	6
2.3 Online survey	6
2.4 Sample of participants in consultation activities.....	6
3 EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS ACCOMMODATION IN AUGUSTA MARGARET RIVER.....	8
3.1 Defining homelessness in Augusta Margaret River	8
3.2 Rates of homelessness in the AMR area	8
3.3 Causes and impacts of homelessness.....	9
3.4 Safety of people who are experiencing homelessness.....	11
3.5 Perceiving people who are experiencing homelessness.....	12
3.6 Community will to address this issue	13
4 AVAILABLE AND REQUIRED RESOURCES, SERVICES AND SHELTER IN AUGUSTA MARGARET RIVER.....	14
4.1 The need for shelter	14
4.2 Emergency relief and welfare	15
4.3 Support services.....	18
4.4 Caravans, camping and cars.....	20
4.5 Crisis accommodation.....	21
4.6 Increase the quantity and diversity of dwellings.....	23
4.7 Other required resources	25
5 COMMUNITY ACTIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS ACCOMMODATION.....	26
5.1 Emergency relief and welfare	26
5.2 Support services.....	26
5.3 Caravans, camping and cars.....	27
5.4 Crisis and emergency accommodation	28
5.5 Increase the quantity and diversity of dwellings.....	28
5.6 Low-cost housing eco-village in Margaret River townsite	29
6 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SHIRE OF AUGUSTA MARGARET RIVER'S HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY	30
6.1 Emergency relief and welfare	30
6.2 Support services.....	30
6.3 Caravans, camping and cars.....	30
6.4 Development of crisis accommodation	31
6.5 Development of low-cost dwellings.....	31
6.6 Supporting the financing of local homelessness and affordable housing initiatives	32
7 CONCLUSION	33
REFERENCES	34

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May-June 2016, Just Home Margaret River Inc (then known as Augusta Margaret River Affordable Housing Working Group) engaged Augusta Margaret River (AMR) community members (particularly people experiencing homelessness) in participatory workshops and activities to help inform the Shire's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy*. We aimed to support people with experience of homelessness or crisis accommodation to have a voice in the content of the *Strategy*, and develop community actions to address local needs.

Fifty-one people participated in the project, including seven Just Home members (three female, four male), 21 representatives of community organisations (10 female, 11 male), and 23 community members (13 female, 10 male). Twenty of the participants (eight female, 12 male) identified as currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation in AMR.

Homelessness in Augusta Margaret River

Participants reported experiencing or witnessing the following forms of homelessness in the AMR area, mostly in the Margaret River townsite: sleeping rough; sleeping in an improvised dwelling; sleeping in a tent; sleeping in a car; needing crisis accommodation but not able to access any; sleeping in temporary accommodation such as 'couch surfing'; sleeping in an overcrowded house; sleeping in a caravan or caravan park and sleeping in a hostel. 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. The high price of housing continuously emerged as a key cause of homelessness in AMR. Importantly, participants self-identified as people with skills and knowledge to contribute to our community.

Available and required resource and proposed community actions

There are few affordable shelter options for people experiencing homelessness in AMR. Proposed solutions include a community caravan park, informal and formal crisis accommodation, the development of tiny homes and ancillary dwellings, and construction of social housing and community housing, including a low-cost housing eco-village in MR townsite. Shire policy can support community members to implement these proposals.

There exist a handful of emergency relief services in AMR, which could be improved with additional resourcing and community donations. Accessible public ablutions and communications facilities are also required. Few support services are based in AMR, and it is difficult to access housing and homelessness agencies in Busselton and Bunbury due to lack of affordable public transport. Participants identified the need for improved mental health support, and community-based programs in a drop-in centre. It was continually highlighted that AMR requires a locally-based social worker (Housing Advocacy Officer) to share information and raise awareness regarding resources and opportunities, provide access to local accommodation options, collect local homelessness data, manage a database of informal crisis accommodation and rental accommodation, and support the Soup Kitchen caravan program. There is also a lack of crisis accommodation in the South West, and a needs analysis should be conducted to determine an appropriate facility in AMR.

Recommendations for the Shire of Augusta Margaret River

Specific recommendations for the Shire of AMR are shared in this report, and Just Home Margaret River suggests the Shire of AMR's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy* supports the development and provision of appropriate shelter and services for people experiencing homelessness, and the resourcing and provision of services to prevent homelessness.

1 INTRODUCTION

In May-June 2016, Just Home Margaret River Inc (then known as Augusta Margaret River Affordable Housing Working Group) engaged community members (particularly people experiencing homelessness) in participatory workshops and activities to help inform the Shire's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy*. As a form of participatory policy development, the key objective of this work was to support people with experience of homelessness or crisis accommodation in the Augusta Margaret River (AMR) area to have a voice in the content of the *Strategy*. Additionally, this work intended to support people experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation to develop actions to be undertaken in partnership with Just Home Margaret River and other community stakeholders to address local needs.

This report shares experiences of people experiencing homelessness in AMR, analyses available and required resources to support people experiencing homelessness, shares community proposals for whole-of-community actions to address these issues, and makes recommendations for the Shire's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy*. Participants' names and identifying characteristics were changed for confidentiality reasons.

1.1 Background

Just Home Margaret River was formed in May 2015 while the Shire was developing its *Affordable Housing Strategy* (AHS). Several community members from the Margaret River Soup Kitchen and Margaret River Professional Social Work Collective felt the draft AHS did not adequately consider homelessness and its relationship to affordable housing. They hosted a Community Conversation about Affordable Housing and Homelessness in the AMR Shire for community members affected by homelessness, insecure housing or housing stress to share their experiences and policy suggestions with Councillors and Shire staff. This led to the formation of Just Home Margaret River to advocate for a holistic policy response to address shelter issues in our community.

As a result of the Community Conversation and Just Home's engagement with the Shire, homelessness was acknowledged in the AHS, with some associated long-term strategies. However, Just Home members and some Councillors were concerned that the AHS did not sufficiently address critical issues such as the lack of crisis accommodation in our community, lack of support services and the need for interim shelter solutions while long-term solutions are developed. As such, Councillors moved the following motion, "*Council works with the Margaret River Community Resource Centre, Augusta Margaret River Affordable Housing Working Group and other local stakeholders to develop a 'Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy'*".

1.2 Just Home Margaret River

At the time of this report, Just Home Margaret River comprises seven AMR community members, including people with current or previous experience of homelessness and their allies. The group has a solidarity model of working in partnership with people affected by homelessness to develop strategies to address situations of injustice in our community. Our approach focuses on the strengths and resilience of people experiencing homelessness, and we aim to honour and enhance the knowledge and skills of all people involved in Just Home Margaret River work. We understand that homelessness is caused by systemic failure to ensure the human rights of all citizens. We champion the internationally successful approach of 'shelter first' – that when appropriate shelter is immediately provided to people in need, they are more likely to be able to manage co-existing issues such as unemployment, mental health issues and substance misuse. We are committed to leading a whole-of-community response to homelessness, and will manage the community action plan that evolved from this consultation process.

2 METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

As negotiated with Shire officers, Just Home Margaret River conducted the following forms of community consultation to help inform the Shire's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy*. These methods were selected to provide for a variety of ways to participate in the project, prioritising the safety and comfort of community members affected by this issue, and using participatory methods to support community members to engage in policy development.

2.1 Community workshops

Just Home Margaret River held four participatory community workshops as part of this project.

A community workshop was held with community members currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation, in the 'primary' level of homelessness (eg people who are sleeping rough or in improvised dwellings). This workshop aimed to gather data relating to individual stories of people's experiences of homelessness in our community, possible actions that could be undertaken in the community to address their needs, and recommendations for the Shire's *Strategy*. The session began with a shared breakfast, followed by a group discussion for participants to share their stories, discuss existing and required resources and the effectiveness of available services, discuss shelter options that could be actioned in the community, and make recommendations for the Shire's *Strategy*. The session ended with a shared lunch and access to the Margaret River Community Centre Foodbank.

Another community workshop was held with community members currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation, in the 'secondary' and 'tertiary' levels of homelessness (eg people living in refuges, couch surfing, or living in caravan parks or boarding houses), as a follow up to the 2015 Community Conversation. This workshop aimed to gather data relating to individual stories of people's experiences of homelessness in our community, possible actions that could be undertaken by various stakeholders to address their needs, and recommendations for the Shire's *Strategy*. This workshop followed the same process as the first workshop.

A general community workshop was held with community members who engage with this issue through work, volunteering, personal interest or their own experience of homelessness. The workshop aimed to share the stories and needs of people experiencing homelessness and needing crisis accommodation, collaboratively develop projects for a whole-of-community Action Plan to address these needs, and make recommendations for the Shire's *Strategy*. The workshop began with sharing the findings of the first two workshops, specifically focussing on the articulated needs of affected community members, and their preferred community actions to address their needs. Workshop participants then formed small groups, focussing on potential actions that emerged from the earlier workshops: emergency relief and welfare; support services; caravans, camping and cars; crisis accommodation; developing dwellings; and low-cost housing eco-village. These groups discussed and strategised opportunities for innovative and practicable projects for a whole-of-community Just Home Margaret River-led Action Plan to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness and needing crisis accommodation. The workshop also made recommendations for the Shire's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy* to support local actions.

Prior to the first community workshop, a workshop was held with the members of Just Home Margaret River to test the proposed workshop methodology and ensure that group members could share their experiences. The workshop followed the same process as the first community workshop.

2.2 One-to-one discussions

Individual one-to-one discussions were held with some attendees of the Margaret River Soup Kitchen who were currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness. These discussions considered the same questions as the first community workshop.

2.3 Online survey

A short online survey regarding homelessness and crisis accommodation was available on the AMR Shire website and in written format. The survey aimed to collect preliminary data about community members currently or previously affected by the issue of homelessness, and gather suggestions for how the Shire can support approaches to address homelessness and the need for crisis accommodation. Quantitative questions gathered demographic information regarding homelessness, while qualitative questions intended to elicit experiences, suggestions and strategies from the community.

2.4 Sample of participants in consultation activities

The following table shows that a total of 51 people participated across the consultation activities, including seven members of Just Home Margaret River (three female, four male), 21 representatives of community organisations (10 female, 11 male), and 23 community members (13 female, 10 male). Although age data was not collected across the sample (apart from the survey), we estimate the age range of participants was between 20 and 75.

Table 1: Description of participants in consultation activities

Description of participants	Women	Men	Total
Participants who were Just Home Margaret River members	3	4	7
Participants who were representatives of community organisations	10	11	21
Participants who were community members	13	10	23
TOTAL	26	25	51

Some people participated in more than one activity, and the following table shows the number of participants in each consultation activity led by Just Home Margaret River:

Table 2: Number of participants in each consultation activity

Consultation activity	Women	Men	Total
Participants in workshop with some Just Home Margaret River members (to test methodology and gather data about Just Home Margaret River members currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation or working in this space)	2	3	5
Participants in first community workshop with people currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation (numbers exclude Just Home Margaret River members)	1	3	4
Participants in second community workshop with people currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation (numbers exclude Just Home Margaret River members)	1	4	5
Participants in general community workshop with community members who engage with this issue through work, volunteering, personal interest or their own experience (numbers include six Just Home Margaret River members)	18	19	37

Participants in one-to-one discussions with people currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation	2	1	3
Participants in survey of community members who have experience or interest in this issue	5	1	6

Furthermore, 20 participants across the sample self-identified as currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation in the AMR area, as outlined in the following table:

Table 3: Number of consultation participants who identify experiencing homelessness

Consultation activity	Women	Men	Total
Participants identifying as currently experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation	2	7	9
Participants identifying as previously homelessness or needing crisis accommodation	4	4	8
Participants identifying as at risk of experiencing homelessness or needing crisis accommodation	2	1	3
TOTAL	8	12	20

3 EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS ACCOMMODATION IN AUGUSTA MARGARET RIVER

This section shares definitions and rates of homelessness in Augusta Margaret River. It also discusses the causes and impacts of homelessness, safety of people experiencing homelessness, perceiving people experiencing homelessness and community will to address this issue.

3.1 Defining homelessness in Augusta Margaret River

Just Home Margaret River understands homelessness according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definitionⁱ of being without a 'home' that provides a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space.

Agencies at the Shire's Community Network Group (CNG) meeting focusing on homelessness (24 April 2016) reported that homelessness in the AMR area is very challenging to quantify and measure. We concur with this assessment. Participants across the sample reported experiencing or witnessing all of the following forms of homelessness in the AMR area, mostly in the Margaret River townsite:

- Sleeping rough (eg, on the street, without a roof)
- Sleeping in an improvised dwelling (such as a verandah)
- Sleeping in a tent
- Sleeping in a car
- Needing crisis accommodation but not able to access any
- Sleeping in temporary accommodation such as 'couch surfing' or a refuge
- Sleeping in an overcrowded house
- Sleeping in a caravan or caravan park
- Sleeping in a hostel

Andrew has been camping in the bush in Margaret River for three years. He said, 'No one has helped me'. He has been on the Department of Housing priority list since December 2015 and was told he would need to wait another year until a house becomes available. He cannot move away from Margaret River because his children live here.

3.2 Rates of homelessness in the AMR area

It is very difficult to know exactly how many people meet the classification of 'homeless' in the AMR area. Some statistical and anecdotal data provides insight into the issue.

As Just Home Margaret River reported in our submissions to the Shire's *Housing Affordability Strategy*, 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 Augustaⁱⁱ. We stress that the total figure of 37 people who met the definition of homelessness on 2011 Census night in the AMR local government area is most likely a statistical under-representation of homelessness in our community. It is very difficult to access people who are homeless to accurately collect Census data regarding real rates of homelessness, and our local population has increased since 2011. Furthermore, it must be noted that Census night was on 9 August 2011, which is the middle of winter in AMR, and Just Home Margaret River concurs with agencies at the CNG meeting that homelessness is likely to be higher in summer.

Other statistics also give insight into the possible rate of homelessness in our community. Homelessness Australiaⁱⁱⁱ reports that on any given night, 1 in 200 people in Australia are homeless, which would equate to around 66 people experiencing homelessness in AMR local government area. Additionally, Homelessness Australia reports that in WA, 42.8 persons per 10,000 population are homeless. In AMR, this would equate to around 56 people experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing^{iv} acknowledges that census statistics generally under-represent incidences of homelessness, and calculates that approximately 80 persons per 10,000 population accessed specialist homelessness services in Western Australia in 2013-2014. This would equate to around 105 people in the AMR area.

Further to these general statistics, Just Home Margaret River members have anecdotal insight into numbers of people who meet the definition of homelessness in the AMR area. A Just Home Margaret River member who is currently camping in a tent in the Margaret River bush could name 15 people who are currently sleeping on the main street in Margaret River town. One Just Home Margaret River member could identify 30 people who are couch surfing in Margaret River town, and another 15 people couch surfing in Prevelly. Another Just Home Margaret River member knows of at least six people living in caravans and four people living in cars. Along with the nine people who identified as currently homeless in these consultation workshops, we can identify a cumulative total of nearly 80 people currently homeless in the AMR area, noting that this is winter data. There would likely be more people experiencing homelessness in our area that we are not aware of.

As such, based on available census data, available welfare research and our anecdotal information, we estimate that at least 80-100 people are experiencing homelessness in the AMR area. This figure would fluctuate seasonally, and would be higher in summer. However, it is important that we are cautious with this figure, and more rigorous data collection is needed to better understand the local rate of homelessness.

3.3 Causes and impacts of homelessness

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^v. The Australian Health and Welfare Institute^{vi} shares the key causes of homelessness in WA for people using specialised homelessness services: 34% experience homelessness due to domestic violence and relationship issues; 28% are homeless due to financial difficulties from housing stress and unemployment; 19% are homeless due to accommodation issues including housing crisis and inadequate or inappropriate dwellings; and, 5% are homeless due to health issues such as substance abuse and mental illness.

The CNG meeting found that a key driver of homelessness in AMR is unemployment / underemployment (lack of full time work), while other common drivers include mental health, drug and alcohol and family breakdowns combined with lack of diverse housing options, lack of local services and issues with referrals.

In our community consultations, it was not able to be determined (and, possibly, it is not helpful to determine) whether issues such as substance use, mental illness, unemployment and violence were the cause of homelessness or came about as a result of experiencing homelessness. It was clear, however, that homelessness exacerbates the risk of these issues. For example, several workshop participants currently experiencing homelessness explained that they regularly drink alcohol because they are lonely and to keep warm. A male currently experiencing homelessness and living in the Margaret River bush explained that he cannot

find a stable job until he has a stable home – but his Newstart Allowance does not provide him sufficient funds to privately rent a house.

In our consultations, the current high price of housing in AMR continuously emerged as a key cause of homelessness. A female survey respondent stated, 'there is no appropriate accommodation available'. Another female survey respondents stated that AMR needs 'reasonably priced rental accommodation without bully boy tactics from real estate property management teams'. A female currently experiencing homelessness identified the need for 'more help with rentals'.

Indeed, the Shire's *Affordable Housing Strategy* highlights a high median rent of \$400 per week in 2015 (a 44% increase since 2011), and a median family income of \$1,327 per week. Furthermore, the AHS notes that in 2011, 26.2% of renters in the households receiving the bottom 40% of incomes in the AMR area 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 area (equivalent to Melbourne), which is well above the national average of 5.5. Additionally, cost of living in the AMR area is significant due to lack of public transport and high food and fuel costs. The colloquial phrase 'Mark-Up River' is commonly used in local online forums such as the Margaret River Community Noticeboard Facebook page. High cost of living has serious ramifications for people living in poverty. For example, a female at risk of homelessness explained that her high rent and living costs means that she cannot afford heating in her house.

Poverty is also a prevalent issue in the AMR area and directly relates to homelessness. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM)^{vii} estimates that 1,410 people in the AMR local government area (LGA) are in poverty¹, a rate of 12.5%. Furthermore, 328 children aged 0-14 are in poverty, a rate of 13.5%. These alarming statistics are exacerbated by the high cost of living in the AMR area: NATSEM found that 29.6% of households (209 households) in the AMR LGA were in rental stress.

NATSEM also found that in periods of economic downturn, poverty rates in Australia increased. With the current downturn in the mining boom in WA, which employs a large proportion of local people, the risk of increased poverty in our community is a very real and serious issue.

Another important consideration is the high number of AMR residents receiving a government allowance, as the payment rates for these allowances are insufficient compared to high local rent prices. A comparison of the median rent price of \$400/week and low government allowance payment rates show the importance of affordable and appropriate dwellings in our community to prevent people receiving government allowances from experiencing homelessness.

An AHWG member is aware of three women in Margaret River town who are keeping a roof over their head by trading sex for accommodation.

He said that all the women have teenaged children who live elsewhere (some of the young people are homeless and some are living with friends) because they don't want to be in this environment.

¹ NATSEM (2013) uses the most commonly and accepted international relative poverty measure: "The relative poverty measure... is the half-median version where a household is considered to be in poverty if the household's after-tax income is less than half of the median after-tax income of all households in Australia. To account for differences in household size and structure we equalise incomes using an equivalence scale. This means that incomes are divided by a factor that accounts for household size in order for incomes to be comparable between different household types" (p.6).

The following table draws from ABS^{viii} census data for the AMR local government area and federal government allowance websites:

Table 4: Number of AMR residents receiving a government allowance

Allowance	Number of recipients	Current maximum rate for a single person
Aged pension	939	\$723.10 / fortnight
Carer payment	50	\$794.80 / fortnight
Disability support pension	320	\$794.80 / fortnight
Newstart Allowance	341 (66% on income support for more than 365 days)	\$527.60 / fortnight
Parenting payment single	121	\$737.10 / fortnight
Youth Allowance	56	Between \$237.10 and \$433.20 / fortnight

It is undeniable that access to appropriate and well-resourced support services is necessary for people experiencing homelessness and needing crisis accommodation. However, it was clear to us that the provision of stable, affordable and appropriate shelter is paramount to ensure that people can address co-existing issues such as unemployment, mental illness and substance use. Without housing, it is extremely difficult to manage mental health, reduce substance use and find and maintain a job. Furthermore, without adequate support services, it is difficult to manage the issues that can cause homelessness.

In this regard, we suggest that the Shire's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy* has multiple approaches that support:

- the development and provision of appropriate shelter options for people experiencing homelessness;
- the resourcing and provision of services to prevent homelessness; and
- the resourcing and provision of services to support people experiencing homelessness.

3.4 Safety of people who are experiencing homelessness

The workshops and discussions with people currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness discussed two key questions regarding safety and security: what makes a place safe?; and, what places do you avoid in AMR?

Participants preferred the term 'secure' rather than safe, and identified the following features of a secure place: more than one exit; weather protection (a male participant explained that there is a lack of shelter from the rain in Margaret River townsite); protection from people who are drunk (such as people leaving the pub); 'not being out in the open'; 'not getting clubbed over the head' (note, participants did not feel that violence against people sleeping in public is a major issue in AMR); and, security for children and young people. For people sleeping in public, lighting can be both safe and dangerous. A male currently experiencing homelessness stated that moving sensor lights helped him feel safe when sleeping on verandas. Church buildings were also identified as providing safety. A female participant who had previously experienced homelessness felt that Margaret River has a 'feeling of a family-oriented community' with 'like-minded people'.

Several participants felt that police did not make a place feel safe. They explained that police follow them up as a 'problem' reported by other community members, which means people sleeping in public were moved on to new locations. Another issue that arose was alcohol

consumption. Some male participants who are currently experiencing homelessness explained their relationship with alcohol. Some drink for warmth, others for comfort, and others to feel safe. One male stated, 'The only reason I drink is because I'm lonely... and the more you drink the more you feel negative'. Participants also noted that if they drink they may feel 'safe' but they are actually more vulnerable. Two male participants with experience of homelessness also discussed their positive experiences with marijuana, describing it as 'my medicine' and that 'marijuana was amazing for my road to recovery'.

Participants identified places they avoided in AMR. Exit strips from pubs (foot traffic) were avoided, and some people avoid parks. A male currently experiencing homelessness felt that the main street was unsafe. Some participants identified the social housing flats on Station Road as dangerous. Known colloquially as 'Vampire Alley', this area is notorious for violence and drugs. A female currently experiencing homelessness described Vampire Alley as 'bizarre', with 'old ladies drinking wine and young men snorting crack'. A female at risk of homelessness said, 'I don't want to live on Station Road so I live in a condemned house'. A male participant who is currently experiencing homelessness stressed that people with social issues shouldn't be living together in close proximity.

Luke has been homeless for decades. He moves from community to community around Australia, camping in the bush, living in caravans, staying with friends and other temporary shelter situations. He has been in Margaret River for several months and has slept in front of sporting facilities and under a bridge. He is constantly worried about people walking past him, and his belongings were stolen in one location. Luke is usually moving around in a tent but someone in Margaret River offered him a disused building to stay, and he said, 'I'll leave when I'm ready to go'. Luke explained that he feels depressed and miserable. He has previously had his backpack stolen and has been 'ripped off'.

3.5 Perceiving people who are experiencing homelessness

Throughout the community consultations, it was made very clear that people who are experiencing homelessness are not victims, but are survivors with enormous skills and knowledge to contribute to our community. 'We have something to offer' was commonly stated. Participants explained that they want to contribute to the solution to this issue, and not be passive recipients. One male who previously experienced homelessness stated, 'There are lots of reasons homeless people get into the state they're in and they lose sight of what they can offer'. He believes the community should 'look at homeless people as an asset', as 'we are part of the community'. He believes the community should 'give people opportunities to thrive and do what they want to do'.

Shane has experienced homelessness elsewhere in Australia, and was homeless when he first moved to Margaret River a few years ago. He experienced depression while homeless, and stated, 'being part of community is foundational'. He believes that community is just not there and politics doesn't get there. The system 'shuffle homeless to one corner' creating an 'us and them' scenario and a class divide. Shane is participating in this consultation process because, 'Part of this is to be part of something to make it grow'. He believes everyone has something to offer. He is now living in social housing and believes he is lucky because he had support (such as a borrowing a trailer from his parents) to establish a home.

3.6 Community will to address this issue

Finally, community engagement with this consultation project suggests that there is considerable community will to sustainably address and prevent homelessness in our community. Several participants stated that the voluntarism of the AMR community can support the development of innovative solutions. A female survey respondent who has lived in the community for 15 years said, 'It is a necessity to provide this. We have a responsibility to do this'. She recommended that homelessness is a priority for the AMR Shire Council.

4 AVAILABLE AND REQUIRED RESOURCES, SERVICES AND SHELTER IN AUGUSTA MARGARET RIVER

Just Home Margaret River consultation process asked community members to identify resources, services and shelter that were currently available in their community (both AMR and the South West) and resources, services and shelter that are needed to meet local needs. This section considers the community responses in the themes of emergency relief and welfare; support services; crisis accommodation; caravans and camping; and dwellings.

4.1 The need for shelter

Before discussing other resources and services, we stress that **the need for shelter** was identified by every consultation participant to support people to be safe, secure and warm, and address other issues in their lives. Participants mentioned various forms of shelter such as:

- street swags (and secure locations);
- an affordable caravan park and campground with ablutions;
- youth accommodation or communal house;
- crisis accommodation such as a women's refuge and youth crisis accommodation that is appropriately supervised;
- affordable intermediary (short-term) accommodation;
- share accommodation that is clean, secure and respectful;
- increased social housing and National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) housing;
- affordable rentals; and
- ancillary swellings, tiny houses, transportable homes and dongas, second houses on rural land, workers' accommodation, houses built from recycled building materials, and land to construct housing.

Importantly, nearly all participants identified that their preferred shelter option would be a self-contained house. Positive aspects of a house included stability, 'not being moved on' (male currently experiencing homelessness), 'it can help people', security, and basic facilities such as a toilet and shower, which were considered particularly important when living with children. A male who previously experienced homelessness stated that a house is a 'place to focus on long-term goals; your mind is too preoccupied on basic necessities with other shelter options'.

Frank is currently homeless and stays in an onsite van in a caravan park. He pays \$120 per week and is on the Disability Support Pension. His van has ant poison with a lot of dust and he is worried about his 7 year-old daughter staying with him.

He said, 'My child sees me cry and panic and get angry... it all gets so overwhelming. The cold comes through the floor of the van, and putting underlay between the lino and concrete of the annex is just one of the many things on the "when I have enough money to eat properly I'll do..." list. And her slippers are too small for her... that goes before the list'.

Frank considers his caravan an insecure home because the State government has introduced legislation that by five years all caravans need to be roadworthy, which means his onsite van will be illegal. He does not have sufficient funds to make his caravan roadworthy.

Nevertheless, numerous challenges were also identified regarding living in a house. The key issue was high costs associated with a house, such as high rental prices and managing a budget and bills. A male participant stated, 'some people don't have the mental capacity to get a bond, pay rent and cover the daily expenses'. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that rent is a lot of money, and 'we could be paying off our own house'. A male who previously experienced homelessness and would like his own home said, 'the banks will have nothing to do with me'.

Additionally, some participants who receive government allowances explained that they cannot afford electricity and heating costs. Participants recognised that the main style of housing in AMR is too big and too expensive - most houses are designed for a couple or family, and there are few affordable options for a single person or couple without children. Other issues with renting a house included managing short leases, managing a garden, and dealing with neighbours. Furthermore, participants identified that it is difficult to establish a home without local networks to buy and move furniture. A female participant who is at risk of homelessness said that some affordable houses are not habitable. Additionally, a male participant who is currently experiencing homelessness noted it may be difficult for Indigenous people to rent a home as family members might also stay and it can be difficult to go against cultural norms. A female participant who is at risk of homelessness shared that she has rented rooms to lodgers in order to reduce her living costs, and has previously 'let the wrong people in', which resulted in violence and the house being destroyed. She said that she would be happy to live in a caravan but she has a child and nowhere to place the van.

Issues with building and owning a home included needing land, difficulties accessing a loan due to credit history, ongoing costs of home maintenance and rates, and clearing trees to build houses. A male participant who previously experienced homelessness was interested in purchasing his own home, and contacted Department of Housing (DOH) regarding the Keystart Loans program. He explained that DoH told him that they don't do shared equity in Margaret River. Innovative homes such as tiny homes were strongly supported in by workshop participants, although one male participant currently experiencing homelessness noted that land developers won't allow tiny homes due to restrictive covenants.

One male participant currently experiencing homelessness stated that his preferred form of shelter was camping in the bush. However, issues with this shelter included the risks of belongings being stolen and rangers moving on campers, and he asserted his preference for 'a roof and a lockable door'. He was previously given a street swag when staying in Perth but it was too big so he cut it up for useful small parts.

Importantly, a female survey respondent warned against generalising the response to the issues of homelessness and crisis accommodation, and explained that the shelter needs of people with specific issues need to be considered separately. This includes the needs of groups such as young people, people with substance misuse issues, and perpetrators and survivors of abuse (including domestic violence, sexual abuse and emotional abuse).

The various forms of shelter identified in this consultation project will be considered throughout this section.

4.2 Emergency relief and welfare

The theme of 'emergency relief and welfare' comprises basic needs such as food, water, hygiene, warmth and communications. These resources are required when people have little or no money, people suddenly find themselves without shelter, or people are homeless and don't have access to basic facilities.

Available resources and services regarding emergency relief and welfare

The following emergency relief and welfare resources were identified by participants in Just Home Margaret River consultations, as well as the CNG meeting:

- **Margaret River Soup Kitchen ('the Soupie')** is a volunteer-led program that provides two cheap vegan meals per week at the Margaret River Community Centre. The Soupie can also lend out four caravans to people for emergency and short-term accommodation. Positive comments about the Soupie were that it is 'awesome - everyone getting together and eating' (male currently experiencing homelessness). The Soupie is known to provide a sense of community and connectedness. A male who had previously experienced homelessness explained that Soupie was his introduction to Margaret River, while a female at risk of homelessness stated, 'I go there when I'm lonely'. Some participants also identified some areas for improvement for the Soupie. Firstly, the caravan program needs to have more structured management. This was also reported in the 2015 Community Conversation. Furthermore, some participants expressed a need for Soupie meals to have meat. A male currently experiencing homelessness said that vegan food was not appropriate for Aboriginal people. Some participants also identified that there is sometimes a 'negative energy' at Soupie, with 'dirty looks if you don't cook' (male currently experiencing homelessness). Some participants identified a sense of expectation that people experiencing hardship should help prepare Soupie meals, and feelings of guilt if they don't assist.
- **Margaret River Community Centre** hosts numerous community organisations and social services. Centre management also provides emergency relief vouchers (funded by the federal Department of Social Services (DSS)) to people in need and some dry goods from Bunbury Foodbank. It also distributes vouchers for showers at the Margaret River Recreation Centre. Other noted resources include two powerpoints located outside the building (which are used for charging phones) and an avocado tree. Other activities also informally evolve at the Community Centre, such as a skills-sharing group. Participants identified some challenges with the emergency relief, stating that the vouchers are 'grossly limited' and provide 'nowhere near enough support'. They felt that DSS allocates insufficient funds for emergency relief to AMR.
- **Emergency relief** vouchers are also provided at St Vinnies op shop. Some participants have also been given food from some local churches. Castle's Legacy has also provided financial support to people in need.
- **Food** is available from the Margaret River Community Centre Foodbank, dumpsters outside shops and restaurants, and the newly established Margaret River Community Gardens will soon support people to grow their own food. The Swap, Shuffle, Share program at Fairharvest also supports people to barter for fresh food, although the location out of town makes it difficult to access.
- **Filtered water fountains** are now available throughout Margaret River town.
- **Limited public ablutions** are provided in public toilets, and showers are available at the Margaret River Recreation Centre. Ablutions are also available in private locations such as caravan parks. However, participants noted that public toilets are closed by the evening, and a shower at the Recreation Centre costs \$5.50. Shower vouchers are available from the Margaret River Community Centre, but it is a time-consuming walk between locations. Furthermore, some people currently experiencing homelessness felt ashamed showering in the Recreation Centre. Some people bathe at the weir.
- **Public bbqs** are available in Rotary Park in Margaret River. However, these bbqs are only available until 8pm, and participants noted that in summer it is too light at 8pm for people experiencing homelessness to use them as families are still in the park.
- **Limited communications facilities** are available in the community. The free mainstreet wifi is very difficult to connect to and no participant articulated that it is useful. There is

free wifi at the Woolworths shopping complex but no space to sit. The library provides two hours of free wifi connection per library member per day, which participants felt was insufficient if they are searching for work or contacting their families.

- **The hospital** can provide a safe night's sleep. One male currently experiencing homelessness stated, 'the hospital always there when I'm in a situation and need to make myself safe'.
- **Margaret River Library** is warm and has computers. Participants experiencing homelessness noted that there are 'lots of people' at the library, and issues with needing to pack up your belongings if you need to leave the building or use the bathroom. One male participant currently experiencing homelessness stated, 'if you are smelly you won't go in'. The library has an outside seating area but people must walk through the library to use it.
- **Affordable furniture and household goods** are available from the Lions Sheds in Margaret River, Cowaramup and Augusta, as well as other op shops throughout the AMR area. Some participants currently experiencing homelessness identified some challenges with purchasing goods at the Margaret River Lions Shed at its fortnightly opening, stating that it is 'too busy' and that 'rich people get there early and buy the useful stuff'. Furthermore, community members need a trailer to move furniture to their home, or pay Lions for delivery.
- **Information** about local services and activities is available in pamphlets and by word of mouth at the Margaret River Community Centre and at other agencies. However, one male participant who had previously experienced homelessness felt that available information was 'sporadic' and 'not obvious' with too much text. The Margaret River Community Noticeboard Facebook page was also considered a resource for collecting goods for people in need.
- **Few public and affordable transport** options are available, apart from repaired secondhand bikes from Brian Gale and the Margaret River Rideshare Facebook page.

Required resources and services regarding emergency relief and welfare.

Consultation participants identified the following resources and services that were needed to address emergency relief and welfare needs (excluding accommodation):

- **Additional emergency relief** funding is needed to supplement the low levels of emergency relief currently available.
- **Providing fresh food** was suggested by many participants, including fresh meat, fruit and vegetables. Several participants suggested that the Margaret River Community Centre collect and distribute fresh food, such as second grade fruit and vegetables, and leftover food from markets. Some participants also suggested that a group host a Friday breakfast at the Margaret River Community Centre, and that the Soup Kitchen review the days it is available, provide one meat meal per week and consider providing a lunch meal. A female participant at risk of homelessness stated, 'breakfast is good to get into a good headspace for the day'. More opportunities to share produce in Margaret River town were also supported, along with more volunteer support at the Soup Kitchen.

Brendan is currently experiencing homelessness and is staying with a local man who provides shelter for people in need. He says 'it is hard to find shelter' in AMR and he has had no interaction with local services.

He feels that Perth has good resources for people who are homeless (food, sleeping bags and swags, good mental health housing with support workers) but these are not available in Margaret River.

The general community workshop group identified the need to better resource Foodbank in Margaret River. This includes organising volunteers to drive to collect Foodbank from the depot in Bunbury, work with the local supermarkets and businesses to contribute to Foodbank and organising drop off points in local shops for community members to donate food and giftcards. In relation to collecting fresh food for Foodbank, the group identified the need to manage volume, and manage legalities and health issues.

- **Ablutions** are needed in an accessible, central location, including toilets, showers, washing machines, charging points, wifi and communal cooking facilities.
- **Camping gear** needs to be collected for people who are camping or sleeping on the street, such as sleeping bags, tents, thermals and street swags.
- **Increased access to Margaret River Lions Shed** could be achieved through referrals from Margaret River Community Centre or collection of required items (such as camping gear).
- **Security** of belongings can be provided through the construction of lockers at Margaret River Community Centre and in the Main Street upgrade.
- **A community information** Facebook page was suggested to ask community members to donate emergency relief items.

4.3 Support services

In this consultation project, support services encompass services that provide ongoing support, engagement and programming with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and crisis accommodation. Shelter options have been addressed separately.

Available resources regarding support services

Across the consultation activities, participants identified the following currently available support services in the area. Importantly, community workshop participants also identified several issues with the currently available support services:

- **Centrelink** has an agency in Margaret River town where residents can lodge forms, use computers and call Centrelink support services. However, participants stated that ‘the agency in Margaret River is not able to do a lot’ as the agency ‘doesn’t have authority to do things on our behalf’, and community members regularly need to visit the office in Busselton, which is difficult due to lack of affordable public transport. One male currently experiencing homelessness felt that Centrelink wasn’t too much of a problem, while others noted the need for supporting people to understand and apply for their entitlements. Participants also recognised that Centrelink does not provide much support for people with disability.

Mike has been in Margaret River for two years, is currently homeless and has been homeless for 3 years. His experiences of homelessness in AMR area include sleeping rough, sleeping in an improvised dwelling, sleeping in a tent and seeking crisis accommodation but unable to access any.

He states, ‘some local services are very good, but they are limited to what they can provide to help persons out of homelessness’.

- **Some mental health services** are available in the AMR area, including LAMP and South West Mental Health (SWMH). Several participants were positive about LAMP’s activities in Margaret River, such as the music program and weekly shared meals. These activities were said to assist with ‘integration’ and are ‘good for talking’, and participants wanted

more similar activities. No participants had positive remarks about SWMH. A male participant currently experiencing homelessness described SWMH as 'Fort Knox' with 'disgraceful' service. He found it very difficult to personally coordinate his various support services with an overarching care plan, and it was hard to access counsellors, especially counsellors trained in specific areas (such as incest). He stated that his care plan didn't come together when the issues became most urgent and he was 'heading for breaking point'.

- **Community** was considered an important resource by participants, and can be accessed through structured activities such as the Soup Kitchen, Baptist Church Craft group and Men's Sheds in Cowaramup, Augusta and Margaret River. Friends and other networks were also considered a resource. The general community workshop group focussing on emergency relief and welfare identified that AMR is a small community and 'less dangerous' than other areas.
- Participants identified various **community facilities** that could be used for a drop in centre, such as the Zone Room or the Margaret River Community Centre.

Notably, the CNG meeting identified various support services that are available in Busselton and Bunbury, such as Access Housing, Accord West, Waratah, Centrecare, and State and federal government agencies. However, very few consultation participants in the AMR community workshops identified support services that are available in Busselton and Bunbury. These services were perceived as unavailable because they are 'too difficult to access' due to distance, lack of transport and difficult opening hours. The bureaucratic nature of support services was also considered problematic.

Required resources regarding support services

Participants identified various services that are required to support people experiencing homelessness and needing crisis accommodation in AMR:

- **Centrelink** information is required regarding benefits and processes (such as DSP fuel vouchers, pensioner fuel vouchers, and requesting weekly rather than fortnightly payments). Participants also need access to Centrelink officers or administration officers located in AMR (such as Margaret River Community Centre or a to-be-developed drop-in centre) to assist with Centrelink paperwork.
- **Transport** options are needed to access services in Busselton and Bunbury, and to move around AMR (including transport to caravan parks). Participants noted that facilities in Margaret River town were distanced far away from each other, which was difficult for people who are walking (especially when raining).
- **A drop-in centre** was suggested as a place for activities, access to services such as Centrelink and a social worker, and provision of ablutions and basic resources.
- **Service coordination** is necessary so that support services working with the same clients can form stronger networks and develop integrated case plans.
- **Community** can be fostered with mentoring programs, inclusive activities, community spaces and revitalisation of the Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS). A male who previously experienced homelessness stated, 'being part of community is foundational'. He also felt that Margaret River is cliquy, and stated, 'On weekends there is not a lot on except drinking at Settlers [which] continues the cycle of alcohol. There is nowhere for clean fun'. A lot of local events have a high cost associated, such as the Margaret River Readers and Writers Festival, Creative Emergence Festival and Cinefest Oz. Inclusive activities at a drop-in centre were strongly suggested.
- **Information** is required about available resources, services and opportunities for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Participants in the first workshop suggested a Life Skills handbook. One participant said it was important to 'know who can help' while

a male participant experiencing homelessness believed that services don't seem aware of other services in the local area. The general community workshop group focusing on support services suggested that the community needs a handout card with information to be handed out to people experiencing homelessness via rangers, police, Centrelink, Margaret River Community Centre, backpackers lodges etc.

- **Employment** opportunities were considered very important. A male participant who had previously experienced homelessness identified the need to 'give people opportunities to thrive and do what they want to do', such as wwoofing (working for rent, gaining skills, accommodation and sharing skills). Additionally, participants identified the need for career development workshops, community programs to match individual skills to available jobs, and promoting prioritisation of local people for local jobs.
- **Mental health support services** must be increased and strengthened in AMR. A female at risk of homelessness stated, 'a bad day affects my child'.

Notably, when discussing the support service gaps, every workshop identified the need for a local social worker working as a **Housing Advocacy Officer** at the Margaret River Community Centre. Similar to the discussion from the 2015 Community Conversation (from which this position originated), participants advocated that this position could share information and raise awareness regarding resources and opportunities, support access to accommodation options in the AMR area, collect data about the incidences and experiences of homelessness in AMR area, develop and manage a database of informal crisis accommodation and available rental accommodation, and support the coordination of the Soupie caravan program.

The Housing Advocacy Officer program could draw from existing programs such as Street to Home that supports people to access secure housing. A female at risk of homelessness stated, 'I really need some structured help', while participants also identified the need to support people who are supporting others. It was particularly highlighted that this social work position would need to be held by a person who lives locally, as the role would involve liaising in the informal and private housing space through established local networks. Participants felt that community housing organisations in Busselton and Bunbury could not provide this locally-focussed service.

4.4 Caravans, camping and cars

Due to lack of affordable housing and lack of crisis accommodation, some residents live in caravans, are camping or sleep in their cars. While long-term housing solutions are required, interim solutions are necessary to ensure that people in these forms of shelter have warmth, security, stability and access to basic services.

Available resources regarding caravans, camping and cars

Workshop participants identified the following resources currently available for people sleeping in caravans, camping and cars:

- **Soup Kitchen caravans** are lent to people without accommodation, provided they can find private land to park the van. As outlined in the 2015 Community Conversation, private caravan parks generally don't accept caravans from the Soup Kitchen, and the program is struggling to find appropriate land with ablutions to place caravans. However, a few private landowners allow people to live in caravans on their property.
- **Informal camping** occurs throughout the AMR area, including at the weir.
- **Community facilities** that are infrequently used could be availed for camping, such as the Speedway site, Saleyards, old tip site and showground facilities.

- **Recent Shire policy** allowing for caravan parks on rural properties was also seen as an available resource.

Jane is a single parent with three children and is on a low income. She previously had difficulty finding a house in AMR. She was new to the community and ended up renting a caravan from a community member and staying at a caravan park for a few months. Jane feels that she has been lucky – with her small income, several supports come at the last minute, such as a short-term lodger, gifts of food and repairs. Otherwise, she says, ‘I don’t know what I would have done’.

Required resources regarding caravans, camping and cars

The following resources are required to support people who sleeping in caravans, camping or in their cars:

- **More caravans and camping gear** is required.
- **Land for caravans and camping** with appropriate ablutions (showers, toilets, bbqs, laundry and communal cooking area) is required to provide a safe and stable campsite.
- **Coordinated management** of the Soup Kitchen caravan program is necessary, with appropriate skills and resources.
- **Leniency from rangers** is required for people camping or sleeping in their cars. Some participants identified challenges with local rangers when camping in the bush, sleeping in the street or sleeping in cars. One male currently experiencing homeless stated, ‘when no accommodation is available we camp, but the rangers move us on’. Another male who is currently experiencing homelessness explained that when AMR rangers pack up camps they hold prescription medication for seven days then destroy them, which can be a serious concern for people with health issues.

Sarah has an adult son who is homeless, and has recently become homeless herself. She has been offered a Soup Kitchen caravan but has nowhere to place it. She said, ‘if I had a street swag I could sleep under a tree’. She has been asking community members if she can put up her tent in their backyards.

4.5 Crisis accommodation

Crisis accommodation is necessary when people suddenly find themselves without adequate shelter, or need safety from violence. Common forms of crisis accommodation in Australia are women’s refuges, youth crisis accommodation facilities, and boarding houses. Agencies participating in the CNG meeting regarded crisis accommodation as a priority issue in AMR.

Available resources regarding crisis accommodation

The consultation process, particularly the general community workshop, identified the following available resources for AMR residents:

- **Women’s refuges** are available in Busselton, Bunbury and Manjimup. Although the distance from AMR may be appropriate for safe refuge for women escaping domestic violence, the location of these refuges may not be appropriate for women and their children who are experiencing homelessness but need to remain in the AMR community.
- **Backpacker’s lodges** are available in the community, but they do not accept referrals from the Margaret River Community Centre. Furthermore, a male currently experiencing

homelessness shared that backpacker's lodges are often booked out and cost \$180+ per week.

- There are numerous **empty houses, rooms and granny flats** in the AMR area and the **church campgrounds** in Busselton.
- Available **resources to support the development of informal crisis accommodation** include the Lions Sheds (furniture), retired tradespeople to support with repairs and the Margaret River Community Noticeboard Facebook page to invite people to join a local database.
- There are **local researchers and agencies** that could help conduct a crisis accommodation needs analysis, a supportive Council and Just Home Margaret River to drive local action. Furthermore, the general community workshop group focussing on this issue felt that there were local people with wealth who could help fundraise for a facility. The group also felt that the local policy regarding developing caravan parks on private rural properties could assist in this space.

Required resources regarding crisis accommodation

Participants identified the following required resources in AMR:

- **Safety, security and crisis accommodation** for women and their children are paramount, particularly if women are experiencing violence or are homeless. This includes ongoing support for women experiencing domestic violence. **A women's refuge** was suggested by several participants, particularly women who had experienced domestic violence or had found themselves suddenly homeless. A female currently experiencing homelessness explained that she needed a refuge when she experienced domestic violence, and would seek a refuge in Margaret River now if it were available as she is considering sleeping in her tent. The general community workshop group recognised the need to gather more data regarding the need for a women's refuge in AMR.

Rachel has lived in the AMR Shire for 26 years. She has previously sought crisis accommodation but was unable to access any. She said, 'I required emergency crisis accommodation because of a domestic situation and was forced to drive to Manjimup'.

Rachel has also tried to find accommodation for other people in crisis situations within the AMR area and 'I have not been able to get anything at all'.
- **Crisis housing** was also suggested by participants, including youth crisis accommodation and accommodation for men.
- **Dormitory housing** for single men was suggested by a male currently experiencing homelessness, or an **informal boarding house** in a private home.
- **More rigorous analysis of needs and opportunities** regarding crisis accommodation in AMR is needed, including whether the community should prioritise developing a women's refuge, a youth accommodation facility, or another facility such as a rehabilitation space for perpetrators of violence. This would also include gathering data of people in crisis and community need from local services, the proposed Housing Advocacy Officer and general community members, as well as analysing available funding sources and state and federal government policy for funding preferences. Research funding would be required to conduct a thorough analysis.
- In the interim, a local **Housing Advocacy Officer** is required to develop and manage a **database** of available land for caravans, rooms and granny flats for people needing crisis

accommodation. This role would also connect people in need with community members providing accommodation, and engage people in crisis with other support services.

- **Funding and community support** is needed to help people provide informal crisis accommodation.

Robert has his own home and provides space for people who are homeless. He currently has four people who are homeless staying with him. He says, 'it's getting expensive having people stay, with gas and electricity'. He said that local by-laws won't allow people to stay with him, but 'we want to help'. He identified the need for support to people who are supporting others.

4.6 Increase the quantity and diversity of dwellings

As noted at the beginning of this section, participants proposed that Just Home Margaret River and the Shire prioritise the development of innovative low-cost housing in the AMR area.

Available resources regarding developing dwellings

Consultation participants identified the following resources currently available in the AMR community:

- **Limited social housing** is available in AMR. The Shire's *Affordable Housing Strategy* noted that there are currently 112 Department of Housing (DoH) dwellings in the AMR area, but 220 households are eligible for DoH housing based on their annual income. This suggests a shortage of more than 100 public housing dwelling. Furthermore, a woman currently experiencing homelessness identified that the design of DoH clusters can be problematic. She stated, 'young people are living in units and they smoke cones and play games with no yard'. Living close to neighbours can cause difficulties, and 'mates from out of town are the problem'.
- **Some existing houses, rooms, land and chalets** are empty in AMR.
- **Retired tradespeople** could assist with repairing houses and caravans.
- **Infrequently used community facilities** such as the Speedway, Agricultural showgrounds and former tip site are potential sites for housing.
- **Recyclable building materials** are available at the Margaret River tip.
- Planning documents for the **Yalgardup Village** (proposed in the late 1990s) are available, and could assist with designing a local low-cost housing eco-village.

Linda lives in a private rental with her young child and pays \$300/week. She believes the house should be condemned as it is in very poor condition, with no outdoor plumbing, asbestos and no fireplace. She would be happy to live in a caravan but feels she cannot because of her child, and cannot find appropriate private land. She would like to move into a smaller granny flat but she cannot find one that is affordable.

She has previously experienced domestic violence, including violence from her child's father, and the house has regularly been destroyed by other people. She lets people who need accommodation to live with her to help her cover the rent but 'I have let the wrong people in with bashings and cops'. Linda is afraid to complain to the

landlord about the condition of the house, as she is worried about being evicted, and feels that she would then be homeless. She believes she is at risk of homelessness. She asserts that a locally-based social worker focusing on this issue would be useful because 'I really need some structured help'.

Linda previously studied nursing for two years and worked as a dental nurse, then had a 'breakdown' and was hospitalised for a month. She said that she needs mental health support. At the moment she feels 'overwhelmed by my rental situation'. Linda was previously a sex worker and now finds it difficult to earn comparatively lower wages in non-sex work. However, she doesn't want to return to sex work. She said, 'I can't get ahead paying \$300/week in rent' and 'some days are really hard... I've only got \$12 in my bag'. She sees the Busselton women's refuge as an option for six weeks free rent.

Required resources regarding developing dwellings

- The general community workshop group identified the need for the **development of ancillary dwellings, tiny houses, transportable dwellings, and workers' accommodation**. They recognised that Shire policy changes are required to allow for the development of more dwellings, such as:
 - Allowing for second homes on rural properties;
 - Changing property zoning to allow for smaller houses and ancillary dwellings;
 - Financial incentives for private landowners constructing small houses;
 - Encourage large houses to be split into smaller units;
 - Advocate for the State government to release land subject to conditions that would favour purchase by lower income earners; and
 - Allow more than six unrelated people to live in one house (provided it is of appropriate size and has appropriate facilities).
- The group also identified the need for an **informal register of houses and rooms** available for short-term and long-term rental below market rate. This register would be managed by the Housing Advocacy Officer at the Margaret River Community Centre.
- **A low-cost housing eco-village in Margaret River townsite** was proposed by many community members, and would require land from the Shire to be put into a trust and community members to voluntarily join a Steering Group to drive this project.

Diana, aged 28, has lived in the AMR area her whole life. She has been homeless for the past six months 'when my last rental ended and I am staying with my parents until I can find an affordable solution'. Her experiences of homelessness include sleeping in temporary accommodation such as 'couch surfing' or a refuge and sleeping in an overcrowded house. She explains that housing unaffordability is the key cause of her homelessness: 'The rent is expensive and it's hard to find small houses to suit singles or couples. Most of the rentals available are 4 bed 2 bathroom, too big for many people'.

Diana is unsure of available services and states, 'I am one of the lucky ones who has family living in the region so I always have a spare bed to borrow or a couch to crash

on'. She says, 'something needs to be done. I can't afford to live here. I am single so can only rely on a single income to cover rent. It might be easier if I had a partner to share costs with'.

4.7 Other required resources

Participants in the consultation project also identified the following required resources:

- The general community workshop group identified the need for more community **awareness** of the issue (through social media and local media).
- Several participants identified the need for Just Home Margaret River to incorporate as a local **housing organisation**. This involves deciding an appropriate format (eg NGO or private foundation) and formalising Just Home Margaret River activities. Further to this, it was suggested that the organisation could strengthen the capacity of its members through skills-sharing workshops. It was suggested that each issue area identified in this report has a Steering Group, and the low-cost eco-village would particularly need a 'think tank' and an appropriate organisational format.

5 COMMUNITY ACTIONS TO ADDRESS HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS ACCOMMODATION

An important aspect of this community consultation project was working with community members to collaboratively plan appropriate community actions to address the identified resource, service and shelter needs in our community. This is a deliberative process of grassroots social change and community development, whereby community members affected by this issue are key stakeholders in developing sustainable community responses to address these issues.

The following community actions were developed through this project, and have been compiled into a whole-of-community action plan to address homelessness and crisis accommodation. It is intended that this action plan will be led and managed by Just Home Margaret River, in partnership with organisations such as the Shire of AMR, local community groups, local businesses, and the general community. Importantly, proposed actions within this plan will be prioritised and implemented in short, medium or long-term timeframes over the next 5-10 years, acknowledging the limitations of this work being implemented by community volunteers with limited resources.

5.1 Emergency relief and welfare

Several community actions were identified in this consultation process to address issues of emergency relief and welfare:

- Collect camping gear (tents, street swags, sleeping bags) for people without secure shelter.
- Support people experiencing homelessness to access the MR Lions shed outside of ordinary hours.
- Increase the available funds for emergency relief payments.
- Better resource the Foodbank located at the Margaret River Community Centre, with fresh food and meat as well as dry goods.
- Provide more community meals through the Margaret River Soup Kitchen (eg. one meat meal per week and one breakfast per week).
- Expand community access to the Margaret River Library wifi.

Potential roles of the Shire of AMR to support these actions:

- Promote the collection of goods to be donated.
- Update the community services directory whereby organisations can identify required goods for donation.

5.2 Support services

Several community actions were proposed in the consultation process to strengthen support services for people experiencing homelessness in the AMR area:

- Increase access for AMR residents to South West support services such as Centrelink, Department of Housing, Waratah, South West Aboriginal Medical Service and community housing organisations. This would include increasing the presence of these organisations in AMR, and exploring transport options for AMR residents to access these services in Busselton and Bunbury.

- Develop an information card with details of available services and supports for people experiencing homelessness. This could be distributed through accommodation providers (eg backpackers), Community centre, rangers, police, Centrelink etc.
- Develop a mentoring program with volunteers to connect mentors with community members (particularly men) and people experiencing difficulties. This program could link people to services and offer practical help.
- Connect local services with the schools.
- Develop a drop-in centre with inclusive programs and activities and ablutions (possibly located at the Margaret River Community Centre or the Zone Room).
- Support the development of self-help programs with social activities led for and by people with a history of homelessness (a variation on wwoofing through participating in a self-help program). This could also include the development of a 'Life Skills Handbook' for people who have insecure housing.
- Fund a Housing Advocacy Officer social worker to be located at the Community Centre.
- Coordinate and connect organisations working in this space in AMR and the South West.
- Enhance employment opportunities for people with insecure housing, such as career development workshops, training, job matching and wwoofing.
- Advocate for increased accessibility, resources and quality of mental health services and programs in AMR.

Potential roles of the Shire of AMR to support these actions:

- Support local groups to print and distribute information cards regarding services for people experiencing homelessness.
- Work with the self-help group to consider the Zone Room as a drop in centre, and support the development of showers and laundry.
- Advocate for Busselton and Bunbury-based organisations to locate an officer part-time in AMR.
- Support effective networking and collaboration of local organisations.
- Advocate for increased resources and increased quality of mental health programming in the AMR area.
- Part-fund the proposed Housing Advocacy Officer position at \$20,000 per year for three years to manage community initiatives to address homelessness and crisis accommodation.

5.3 Caravans, camping and cars

Several community actions were proposed in the consultation process to support people living in caravans, camping and living in cars in the AMR area:

- Strengthen the management of the Soup Kitchen caravan program.
- Collect more caravans for the Soup Kitchen caravan program.
- Develop a community caravan park on Shire land with ablutions, communal kitchen and lounge, lockers, bbq facilities and tents and swags. The caravan park would have flexible rates for people experiencing homelessness, and would also be available to backpackers at affordable rates. The income from holiday-makers and backpackers would fund an on-site manager and maintenance costs.
- Develop an ablution block with showers and laundry at the Margaret River Community Centre.
- Construct lockers and charging points on the main street and at Margaret River Community Centre.

Potential roles of the Shire of AMR to support these actions:

- Train rangers in working with people who are experiencing homelessness in the AMR area and record data when engaging with people experiencing homelessness.
- Designate safe car parks for people temporarily sleeping in their cars.
- Develop policy allowing for temporary sites (up to three months) for caravans and camping on spare blocks, private homes and rural land.
- Support the development of a community-run caravan park on Shire land.

5.4 Crisis and emergency accommodation

Several community actions were proposed in the consultation process to develop crisis accommodation in the AMR area:

- Conduct research to analyse the local needs and opportunities regarding crisis accommodation in AMR, including local and South West priorities for the target group of the accommodation.
- Develop informal crisis accommodation in the AMR area through a database of people with available rooms/land/granny flats for people in need. The placement of local people would need to be managed by the Housing Advocacy Officer.
- Develop a local crisis accommodation facility.

Potential roles of the Shire of AMR to support these actions:

- Provide part-funding for the proposed Housing Advocacy Officer to manage a database of informal crisis accommodation in AMR.
- Support a community funding application for research funds to conduct a need analysis regarding crisis accommodation in AMR.
- Allocate a Shire officer responsibility for crisis accommodation, who can join a local steering group to drive the development of this facility.
- Facilitate, advocate for and support the community to access funding for crisis accommodation in AMR.

5.5 Increase the quantity and diversity of dwellings

Several community actions were proposed in the consultation process to assist the development of diverse and low-cost dwellings for people experiencing homelessness in the AMR area:

- Construct tiny homes, granny flats and small dwellings throughout AMR using dongas, pre-fabricated houses, structural panels and relocatable homes.
- Construct larger homes, including community housing, social housing and private housing.
- Vary the usage of existing houses.

Potential roles of the Shire of AMR to support these actions:

- Advocate for more social housing, community housing and NRAS housing in AMR.
- Promote and support landowners to develop ancillary dwellings.

- Develop policy to address restrictions and develop incentives for community members to build new low-cost dwellings, such as:
 - Allowing for second homes on rural properties;
 - Changing property zoning to allow for smaller houses and ancillary dwellings;
 - Financial incentives for private landowners constructing small houses;
 - Encourage large houses to be split into smaller units;
 - Advocate for the State government to release land subject to conditions that would favour purchase by lower income earners; and
 - Allow more than six unrelated people to live in one house.
- Designate land for the development of housing to address homelessness (we note that this was achieved in the *Affordable Housing Strategy*).

5.6 Low-cost housing eco-village in Margaret River townsite

A key community action that emerged from this consultation process is to develop a low-cost and sustainable housing eco-village close to Margaret River town with diverse shelter options. This eco-village would be on Shire-allocated land such as the old tip site in Margaret River (the site of the Yalgardup eco-village previously proposed in the 1990s). The permaculture-based eco-village would be a visionary model of sustainability and social justice, and have diverse dwellings including social housing, community housing (and possibly private housing), tiny homes and relocatable homes (dongas, demountables, shipping containers), artists residences and Earthships built with recycled materials. Dwellings would have creative rental options, such as rent paying off the house.

The eco-village would have a community caravan park to provide space for people living in caravans and camping, as well as generate income for the community. The caravan park would have communal facilities such as ablutions, laundry, cooking area and bbqs. A community centre would provide access to services and community activities, and shared gardens support the community to grow its own good. This eco-village would be sustainable with its own water, food and energy supply. A solar renewable energy grid could be developed to supply the eco-village and beyond with energy. The community would also include employment opportunities for tenants (such as maintenance and management).

A very important aspect of this proposal is ensuring that this project doesn't segregate and separate low socio-economic people from the Margaret River community. Thoughtful design of the village and land use will support diverse permanent and temporary dwellings, and relocatable homes will help mitigate potential conflict between residents. The community run caravan park will provide income to the community (including the community management), and connect the eco-village to the local and global community. It is suggested that this eco-village has a 'social enterprise' model, partnering with innovators to use progressive financial models such as crowdfunding. The general community workshop group suggested that this eco-village be placed into a trust so that it is taken out of the housing market and has no 'value' and therefore cannot be charged Shire rates.

Potential roles of the Shire of AMR to support this action:

- Give in principle support to the development of a low-cost housing eco-village in Margaret River townsite.
- Work in partnership with a local Steering Group to develop this project.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE SHIRE OF AUGUSTA MARGARET RIVER'S HOMELESSNESS AND CRISIS ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

6.1 Emergency relief and welfare

Local organisations will work to increase resources for emergency relief and welfare for people experiencing homelessness in our community.

Recommendations:

- That the Shire of AMR assist in promoting the collection of emergency relief and welfare supplies for local groups.
- That the Shire of AMR's public database of community organisations also lists goods or services that can be donated to each organisation.
- That the Shire of AMR construct affordable public lockers in the Main Street upgrade project.
- That the Margaret River Library's free wifi service is more readily available for community members experiencing homelessness or financial hardship.

6.2 Support services

There is a significant lack of appropriate support services in the AMR area to support people currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness. South West services based in Busselton and Bunbury are inaccessible to AMR residents.

Recommendations:

- That the Shire of AMR and AMR community groups advocate for Busselton and Bunbury-based organisations such as Department of Housing, Waratah, Centrelink, community housing organisations and South West Aboriginal Medical Service to locate officers part-time in AMR, preferably at the Margaret River Community Centre.
- That the Shire of AMR support social justice organisations working in AMR to more effectively network and collaborate with shared goals.
- That the Shire of AMR advocate for increased resources and increased quality of mental health programming in the AMR area.
- That the Council part-fund a Housing Advocacy Officer at \$20,000 per year for three years to manage community initiatives to address homelessness and crisis accommodation.

6.3 Caravans, camping and cars

An interim solution is urgently needed to provide a safe location for people to sleep in caravans, tents and cars in the AMR area.

Recommendations:

- That Shire of AMR rangers are trained in responding to people who are experiencing homelessness in the AMR area, including cultural awareness training.
- That Shire of AMR rangers maintain a database of their interactions with people experiencing homelessness to aid data gathering about this issue.

- That the Shire of AMR designate safe car parks for people temporarily sleeping in their cars.
- That the Council develop policy allowing for temporary sites (up to three months) for caravans and camping on spare blocks, private homes and rural land.
- That Council support the development of a community-run caravan park on Shire land.
- That the Shire of AMR work in partnership with Just Home Margaret River, providing planning and legal support for the development of a community caravan park.

6.4 Development of crisis accommodation

There are no crisis accommodation facilities in the AMR area, and a lack of facilities in the South West more generally. However, a more rigorous needs analysis is required to determine the most appropriate target group for a local crisis accommodation facility.

Recommendations:

- That the Shire of AMR supports a funding application for a research grant for Just Home Margaret River to conduct a needs analysis regarding crisis accommodation in the AMR area.
- That a Shire of AMR officer is allocated responsibility for crisis accommodation and joins a local steering group to participate in the development of this facility.
- That the Shire of AMR facilitate, advocate for and support the community to access funding for crisis accommodation in AMR.

6.5 Development of low-cost dwellings

Participants in this project comprehensively stressed that diverse forms of shelter are necessary to help address the issues of homelessness and the need for crisis accommodation in the AMR area. As discussed, Just Home Margaret River is committed to working with the Shire of AMR and other stakeholders to support to construction of diverse dwellings, accommodation and shelter options in the AMR area.

Recommendations:

- That the Shire of AMR advocate for more social housing, community housing and NRAS housing in the AMR area.
- That the Shire of AMR develop guidelines and facilitate regular community seminars to inform community members how to develop ancillary dwellings on private properties.
- That the Shire of AMR facilitates streamlining the approval process for ancillary dwellings, particularly with pre-approved designs.
- That Council give in principle support to the development of a low-cost eco-village on appropriate Shire land in the MR townsite.
- That a Shire of AMR officer is given responsibility for the low-cost eco-village and joins a local steering group to help develop this project.
- That the Council develop policy to address planning restrictions and develop incentives for community members to build new low-cost dwellings, such as:
 - Allowing for second homes on rural properties;
 - Changing property zoning to allow for smaller houses and ancillary dwellings;
 - Financial incentives for private landowners constructing small houses;
 - Encourage large houses to be split into small units;
 - Advocate for the State government to release land subject to conditions that would favour purchase by lower income earners; and,

- Allow more than six unrelated people to live in one house of appropriate size and with appropriate facilities.
- That the Shire of AMR designate land for development of low-cost housing and crisis accommodation (noting that this was achieved in the *Affordable Housing Strategy*).

6.6 Supporting the financing of local homelessness and affordable housing initiatives

The suggested projects outlined in this report will require significant funding from diverse sources. Just Home Margaret River intends to use innovative and creative methods to raise funds to address these issues, along with accessing traditional funding sources such as government and philanthropic funding. Consultation participants also noted that there are some local people who can assist with fundraising. To that end, the Shire of AMR can be an important partner in assisting in sustainable forms of fundraising.

Recommendation:

- That the Shire of AMR includes in its rates notices mail-out a pamphlet from Just Home Margaret River explaining the local issue of homelessness, and seeking donations from compassionate ratepayers to support projects that are intended to be addressed by our community.
- That the Shire of AMR advocate for State and Federal funding for local projects to address homelessness.

7 CONCLUSION

This report has shared the outcomes of several community consultation activities that were conducted with people currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness in the Augusta Margaret River community, and people working in or interested in this space. The report has outlined available and required resources to support people experiencing homelessness, shares community members' proposals for community actions to address homelessness, and suggests recommendations for the Shire of AMR's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy*.

Reflecting our commitment to grassroots engagement in policy development, all the content of this report, including key recommendations, comes directly from community members with lived experience of this issue.

We acknowledge some limitations of this consultation data. Due to a very short time-frame to conduct and report the consultations, Just Home Margaret River was unable to access more people to participate in the project. We are satisfied with our sample of 51 community members, including 20 people who are currently, previously or at risk of experiencing homelessness or crisis accommodation. However, we acknowledge that with more time, we could have engaged more people in this process. We feel, however, that this report in conjunction with the 2015 Community Conversation report, gives strong insight into the local experiences and issues of homelessness and crisis accommodation.

We also acknowledge that the consultation sample did not include people who live in Augusta. Just Home Margaret River members do not have established relationships with people experiencing homelessness in Augusta, and the short time-frame for the project did not allow us to regularly visit Augusta and build trust in the community to have these conversations. A Shire of AMR officer contacted agencies based in Augusta to discuss localised issues of homelessness, and we promoted the opportunity for Augusta residents to contact us with stories or concerns, via social media. Further work may be required in Augusta to better understand homelessness in that context.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with the Shire of AMR to help inform its *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy*. We recognise that the Shire of AMR's policy is likely to be the first homelessness strategy for a rural local government authority anywhere in Australia, and we applaud the current Council for its visionary commitment to this issue.

We reiterate our earlier remark that a holistic approach is needed to prevent homelessness and support people experiencing homelessness. The consultation data indicates the need for developing support services *and* shelter options in our community. We repeat our suggestion that the Shire of AMR's *Homelessness and Crisis Accommodation Strategy* has multiple approaches that support:

- the development and provision of appropriate shelter options for people experiencing homelessness;
- the resourcing and provision of services to prevent homelessness; and
- the resourcing and provision of services to support people experiencing homelessness.

Just Home Margaret River looks forward to working in partnership with the Shire of AMR to prevent, address and support people experiencing homelessness and needing crisis accommodation in our community.

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