

2008

Homeless Connect Perth

Evaluation Report



Paul Flatau and Caroline Parkinson

December 2008



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to acknowledge the collaborative work that went into the production of this report. Firstly, thanks go to the City of Perth, Volunteering WA and the Homeless Connect Reference Group who asked us to complete this report and who provided assistance throughout its preparation. We would especially like to thank Mara Basanovic, Marija Jelavic and Tom Pavlos for all their help and for their comments and suggestions in regard to the evaluation report. Secondly, thanks go to the homeless people and to all the volunteers and service providers who attended the event and provided information and input into the Evaluation Report.

Paul Flatau and Caroline Parkinson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgement..... | ii |
| Table of Contents | iii |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| What is Homeless Connect?..... | 2 |
| The 2008 Homeless Connect Perth Event | 2 |
| The Evaluation Report | 3 |
| The Evaluation Methodology | 5 |
| Pre-event Service Provider Feedback..... | 5 |
| Client, Service Provider and Volunteer Feedback | 6 |
| Homeless Connect Perth Activities | 9 |
| Services..... | 10 |
| Guests..... | 11 |
| Volunteers | 16 |
| Homeless Connect Perth Outcomes..... | 18 |
| Housing..... | 18 |
| Clothing, Food and other Material Goods..... | 19 |
| Education, Income and Employment | 20 |
| Health | 20 |
| Identification | 21 |
| One-Stop Shop Access to Services..... | 21 |
| Sense of Well-being..... | 21 |
| Networking..... | 22 |
| Issues | 22 |
| Summary and Recommendations | 25 |
| Appendix 1 Service Providers..... | 27 |
| Appendix 2 Homeless Connect Perth Charter | 29 |

INTRODUCTION

Most of us will go home tonight to a place we can call our own. However, for many Australians this is not the case. At the time of the 2006 Census, there were 13,391 West Australians without access to safe and secure accommodation. Many of those in this position stay temporarily with friends, acquaintances or relatives. Others sleep rough on the streets, live in improvised dwellings or rent under insecure boarding house arrangements. Short-term accommodation is also provided to many who would otherwise be homeless through the joint Commonwealth-State Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. Many more are at risk of homelessness, struggling to deal with the issues which contribute to entry into homelessness. It is for all these men, women and children that Homeless Connect has been established.

Homeless Connect brings together homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, providers of homelessness services, volunteers, businesses, specialist service providers, and Local, State and Federal government agencies at one point and on one day with the aim of connecting homeless people with the services they need.

The inaugural Homeless Connect Perth event was held on Wednesday 26 November 2008 at the Citiplace Community Centre, Perth. It proved to be a great success and a rewarding experience for those homeless people that attended as well as the many service providers and volunteers who assisted on the day.

Approximately 700 people attended the event, comprising around 350 homeless guests, around 150 volunteers, about the same number of service providers and City of Perth Citiplace Community Centre staff, together with around 50 people who attended the event launch.¹

The kitchen provided 500 meat meals as well as additional vegetarian and special dietary option meals; 115 homeless guests received haircuts. Four truckloads of clothes, footwear, books, personal hygiene items, toys, and food equalling roughly 12 tonnes together with 250 bags of toiletries were donated. Over fifty different service provider agencies attended on the day. Well over 2,000 instances of support were provided to individual guests. Support ranged from the provision of food, beverages, clothing and haircuts to accommodation-related assistance, health information and clinical treatment, legal advice, outreach support, Centrelink payment support and education and employment-related information and support.

The response from homeless guests, from volunteers and service provider staff to the day was overwhelmingly positive and remained so in the weeks immediately following the event itself.

¹ A list of service providers who attended Homeless Connect Perth is at Appendix 1.

WHAT IS HOMELESS CONNECT?

Homeless Connect is a one-day event intended to connect homeless people or those at risk of homelessness with a broad range of services and provide clothing, food and material supports to meet the immediate needs of homeless people. It brings together government and non-government agencies, community organisations, businesses and volunteers in order to provide guests access to goods and services they may otherwise lack due to their circumstances or simply, in many cases, not know about. And, it represents an opportunity to access private and corporate financial and in-kind support to augment the existing level of funding provided to Perth's homelessness support agencies.

Homeless Connect also provides an avenue for homeless people, service providers and the community to work together to create solutions to homelessness and for providers of services to network, learn collaboratively from one another and share best-practice experiences. Finally, Homeless Connect raises community awareness and participation around the issue of homelessness. In short, Homeless Connect provides an important vehicle among others to achieve positive change for homeless people.

Homeless Connect originated in San Francisco in 2004. It has since spread to 170 cities throughout the USA, Canada, Puerto Rico and Australia. San Francisco now holds their event bi-monthly. It has provided services to many thousands of poor and homeless San Franciscans.

Homeless Connect was first held in Australia in November 2006 and was organised by the Brisbane City Council who now runs the event on a bi-annual basis. Homeless Connect has now come to Western Australia with the City of Perth in partnership with Volunteering WA, initiating the inaugural Perth event held on the 26 November 2008.

THE 2008 HOMELESS CONNECT PERTH EVENT

The significance of homelessness throughout Australia and its impact on capital cities together with the success of the 2006 Brisbane Homeless Connect event was the catalyst for the Council of Capital City Lord Mayors resolving to make Homeless Connect a national project. The City of Perth resolved to fund and implement the staging of Homeless Connect in Perth in 2008 as part of the national program.

It is of note that initially the City of Perth and Volunteering WA were working in parallel to bring Homeless Connect to Perth. Both organisations had heard about the success of the program from their pioneering counterparts in Queensland, the City of Brisbane and Volunteering Qld. Both organisations were looking at the feasibility of running the program in Perth and found strong support in the service sector to implementing the Homeless Connect event in Perth. Eventually, the City of Perth and Volunteering WA converged and combined forces in a partnership to develop the planning infrastructure to run Homeless Connect Perth.

Homeless Connect Perth is a result of collaboration between the City of Perth, Volunteering WA, over 50 service providers and a large number of volunteers. A Homeless Connect Reference Group was established in September 2008. The Homeless Connect Reference Group met fortnightly prior to the event. The Homeless Connect Reference Group was comprised of the City of Perth, Volunteering WA and service providers within the government and community sectors that provide ongoing support to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. Their expertise was invaluable in ensuring that the event reached and remained relevant to its target group and that issues were dealt with effectively and sensitively. All known service providers supporting the homeless were invited to be a part of the reference group. This group expanded as further service providers were identified and came forward.

As set out in the Homeless Connect Perth Charter (see Appendix 2) developed by the Homeless Connect Reference Group, the mission of Homeless Connect Perth is to rally support and create lasting solutions for homeless people within Perth. The key listed goals of Homeless Connect are:

1. Improve access to services and housing for homeless persons in Perth.
2. Engage and increase the collaborative involvement of homeless consumers, business, non-profit community, and individual volunteers to work together to create solutions to homelessness.
3. To improve the system of care by creating opportunities for collaboration and sharing of best practices among Perth's homeless provider community.
4. Leverage private, corporate and foundation money and in-kind support to augment efforts to increase housing options and build service capacity for homeless persons in Perth.

The expected outcomes of Homeless Connect Perth included accommodation, medical attention, legal assistance and counselling for homeless people; the opportunity for businesses and residents to provide practical help to homeless people; increased collaboration among service providers to meet the needs of individuals requiring assistance; social inclusion of those most disadvantaged and engagement of volunteers.

THE EVALUATION REPORT

This Report provides an evaluation of the 2008 Homeless Connect Perth event. Its purpose is to document and provide comment on the planning, implementation and effectiveness of the Homeless Connect event. It is structured as follows.

Section 2 provides an overview of the approach taken to the evaluation and details the survey instruments used to gather relevant data. Section 3 briefly outlines the planning that went into the day and the aims and aspirations of service providers about what the event could achieve.

Section 4 sets out the activities undertaken on the day, provides a snapshot of who attended the Homeless Connect event and the services and goods that were delivered to guests on the day itself.

In Section 5, we discuss the key outcomes of Homeless Connect for homeless people, for the services who provided information and support to the guests and to the many volunteers who attended and assisted the guests. It also discusses a range of issues arising from the day.

The final section sums up and presents a number of key recommendations for the future of Homeless Connect.

THE EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Time and resource limitations meant that it was not possible to implement a fully comprehensive evaluation design. However, with the support of those involved in planning the event, the evaluation team were able to develop a strategy to elicit information on the activities that were undertaken on the day and document their effectiveness for guests, for service providers, volunteers and the community more generally.

The primary means for eliciting information for the evaluation, was a series of short surveys and feedback forms directed to guests, service providers, and volunteers. In addition to the various surveys conducted on the day, tally counts of instances of support or information were kept by most service providers. Regular meetings and contact with those planning the event was undertaken, while on the day itself, the evaluation team made regular visits to service providers and chatted with guests and volunteers to gain a feel for how the day was unfolding.

PRE-EVENT SERVICE PROVIDER FEEDBACK

The first of the feedback forms was administered to Homeless Connect Reference Group members at a meeting of the Reference Group held immediately prior to the event.

The feedback form examined how and why Reference Group members decided to become involved in the planning of the Homeless Connect event and in offering to provide assistance and information on the day, what their aspirations were for the day and their hopes in relation to outcomes for Homeless Connect for guests. The form also attempted to gain an understanding of the ways in which the event may have positive consequences for homelessness policy and service delivery strategies in WA and concerns and perceived risks that Reference Group members had in relation to Homeless Connect.

The summary findings from the pre-event Reference Group feedback are presented below.

The key aims and potential outcomes of Homeless Connect Perth identified by Reference Group respondents can be divided into three major themes: (1) improving information on and access to services for homeless people; (2) enhancing networking among service providers; and, (3) improving outcomes and well-being for homeless people.

When questioned about what Homeless Connect could achieve on the day, several responses emerged. The most common response in relation to what could be achieved by Homeless Connect was the ability of the event to increase the knowledge of homeless people of the services available to them so that they may utilise these services more effectively in the future. The link between information and access is obvious and strong but worth emphasising. As one respondent noted, with respect to their own particular program for homeless people, 'hopefully the program will be better known by the homeless people increasing the chance of them

accessing the program’.

Networking also emerged as a key aim of Homeless Connect. The service providers saw the event as an opportunity to make contacts within and across the sector, making information sharing easier and potentially cutting time spent on bureaucratic processes. This was also highlighted in the Service Providers' Information Kit, which stated ‘The purpose of gathering and sharing private information between and across service team members at Homeless Connect is to improve housing and health outcomes for the guests served at Homeless Connect’.

When asked to identify potential positive consequences of Homeless Connect Perth the majority of responses related to improving the guests’ general well-being and making them feel that there are people who care about them. This sentiment is a powerful one and was shared by the project’s organisers, who believe that Homeless Connect provides an opportunity to show a traditionally marginalised group that they are an integral part of the community, embraced and respected.

CLIENT, SERVICE PROVIDER AND VOLUNTEER FEEDBACK

On the day of the Homeless Connect Perth event, three different feedback forms were administered to the three main groups of people present on the day; namely, guests, volunteers and service providers. Surveys were anonymous and entirely voluntary. Care was taken to avoid intrusiveness and the enjoyment of the day on the part of guests.

The guest-based feedback form was intended to elicit information on the profile of attendees as well as information about the services they accessed on the day, how the day benefited them personally, and how it could be improved. Nominally, the guest feedback was undertaken when the guest had finished for the day and was leaving. However, the absence of a single exit point made it difficult to catch guests, determine whether they were leaving or not and assess whether surveys were only completed at the point of exit. As such, the count of the total number of guests at the event is likely to be considerably higher than the number of respondents. Likewise, the count of the number of different types of services accessed and the impact of those services on respondents is likely to be incomplete and lower than the actual count.

The guest feedback form covered the following topics:

- Sex and age;
- Current accommodation status²;

² Options: (1) Sleeping rough/on the streets/squats; (2) Short-term/emergency accommodation in community/ welfare house/ hostel/ refuge; (3) Boarding/lodging or rooming house; (4) Homeswest (the public housing provider in WA); (5) Private rental boarding; (6) Temporarily with extended family member or friend or acquaintance; (7) Own place; and (8) Other forms of accommodation.

- Source of information on Homeless Connect³;
- Reasons for attending Homeless Connect (*open-ended response question*);
- Different types of services accessed;⁴
- The ways in which Homeless Connect helped them (*open-ended response question*);
- Whether they intended to make further contact with services they met on the day(*open-ended response question*);
- How Homeless Connect could be improved (*open-ended response question*); and,
- Would the guest come again: yes/no.

A numbered ticket book supplemented the guest feedback form. Similar in appearance to a raffle ticket book, the numbered ticket book listed individual services on both sides of each 'raffle ticket'. One side of the ticket was to be torn off and handed to the relevant service provider upon accessing a service and the other half, retained for the client's records.

Notes and contact information could be written on both sides of the ticket. This meant that the service could follow up the guest and likewise the guest could follow up the service if both parties so desired.

Each ticket in given book was numbered with a unique identifier. The unique identifier was included to allow for cross referencing between the guest and the services they accessed whilst retaining anonymity. The unique identifier was then recorded on the guest survey so as to link this information with the demographic and accommodation data.

Unfortunately, ticket books ran out (250 were printed). A small number of services found the ticket book particularly useful, but overall the data gained from this instrument was incomplete and piecemeal with limited use of the ticket book being made by both services and guests.

The second instrument used to collect information on the day was the service provider survey. Each service provider attending Homeless Connect was asked to describe the sector they worked in and the services they were providing at Homeless Connect. They were also asked to keep a tally of the number of guests attending their booth and how many of them received information and/or other forms of assistance. In addition, service providers were asked:

- To list five of the most important positive impacts Homeless Connect has had for attendees;
- Whether they believed their agency/ Department/ organisation achieved its objective/s

³ Options: (1) Government Department; (2) Community or welfare organisation; (3) Print Advertisement; (4) Newspaper/ Magazine Article (5) Radio; (6) and, Word of Mouth.

⁴ Options: (1) Community or welfare agency; (2) Domestic and Family Violence Refuge; (3) Health service; (4) Mental Health service; (5) Drug and Alcohol rehabilitation; (6) Employment; (7) Legal support; (8) Counselling; (9) Indigenous Service; (10) Youth Service (11) Food/Beverage; (12) Massage; (13) Entertainment; (14) Clothes; (15) Centrelink; (16) Haircuts; (17) Department for Child Protection (DCP); (18) Homeswest or Department of Housing and Works; (19) Other services.

for the day;

- If Homeless Connect facilitated a greater cooperation between different sectors when dealing with homeless or at risk clients;
- Whether they encountered any problems on the day; and,
- How Homeless Connect could be improved.

The third instrument developed to collect data on the operation and effectiveness of the Homeless Connect Perth event was the Volunteer feedback form. The form asked volunteers to identify what they aimed to achieve by volunteering for Homeless Connect and whether this was achieved on the day. Volunteers were further asked to assess whether the training they were provided was adequate and appropriate and to estimate the total number of guests they assisted and the ways they assisted them.

An assessment was sought from volunteers on whether the services available were appropriate for the needs of guests and whether any problems were encountered at Homeless Connect Perth. Their views were also sought on ways in which Homeless Connect Perth may have positive consequences for homeless people both in the short term and in the long term.

Finally, volunteers were asked whether they had any suggestions for future Homeless Connect events and whether they would come again. A similar question was included in the guest and service provider feedback forms. The overwhelming majority of guests, volunteers and service providers replied in the affirmative.

HOMELESS CONNECT PERTH ACTIVITIES

Homeless Connect Perth was held on Wednesday 26 November 2008 at the Citiplace Community Centre, Perth. Prior to the day, promotional material, posters and flyers were produced and distributed through a large range of services and to homeless people accessing local community centres in Perth. Meetings of the Homeless Connect Reference Group were conducted prior to the event. The meetings kept service providers up to date on the progress of the event and allowed ideas and suggestions to be shared.

Volunteers were sourced to run the day via the Volunteering WA website, Volunteering WA data bases, universities/TAFEs, churches, businesses and an article on homelessness and Homeless Connect which appeared in the *Sunday Times Magazine* prior to the day. The response to the Sunday Times articles was overwhelming. With so many volunteers responding, many had to be turned away. Two hour volunteer and volunteer leaders training sessions were conducted prior to the event in order to school the volunteers in the running of the day, their primary responsibilities and how to engage with the guests. The volunteer training event was held on three separate occasions and the volunteer leader training session was held once. This allowed sufficient flexibility for all volunteers to attend.

Homeless Connect Perth was held at Citiplace Community Centre, Perth City which is located in the Perth CBD above Perth's central train station. It is therefore easily accessible from both within and outside of the city. Moreover, the Citiplace Community Centre has a broad range of relevant facilities including a kitchen, a dining room, meeting rooms, hairdressing salon, podiatry room, a computing room and wireless connection.

While the majority of services and activities were within the confines of Citiplace, a grassed area outside of the Perth Art Gallery was also made available and a large marquee was erected on this site. This area, located approximately 50 metres from the community centre over a walkway, housed the Donation Distribution Shop, many of the mobile services such as the Lions Hearing Clinic, and the entertainment and arts area. Within the Citiplace Community Centre, services were located both upstairs and down with common services generally grouped together. At the entrance to Citiplace were the Cloakroom, the Communication Area and the Information Area. Shower facilities and a volunteer rest and break-out area were available and accessible on the same level as and a few metres from the Citiplace Community Centre.

Doors opened at 9am and guests were greeted at the door by the volunteer 'meet and greeters' who offered them a welcome cup of coffee and muffin, a ticket book, explained the layout, assessed the guests needs and offered advice. Guests then had the option for volunteers to accompany them as their guide and introduce them to any services they may need, or alternatively to make their own way around freely.

The Homeless Connect launch commenced at 10am in the main dining room and was attended by around 50 specially invited guests, as well as many who were already present. The guests were welcomed by MC Graham Mabury and Phil Bartlett from the Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service, who gave a traditional welcome on behalf of the Noongar community. This was followed by speeches from the Hon Robyn McSweeney MLC, Minister for Child Protection, Community Services, and Seniors and Volunteering; Mara Basanovic, CEO of Volunteering WA; and the Rt Hon Lord Mayor Lisa Scaffidi who officially opened Homeless Connect Perth. A performance by the Spirit of the Streets Choir wrapped up the official launch and entertainment continued throughout the day.

SERVICES

Over fifty service providers provided assistance and support to homeless people attending the Homeless Connect Perth event. They included Government agencies, community homelessness support and accommodation agencies, community health agencies, legal and health practitioners, businesses, professional associations, religious, education and art groups. Non-government services comprised around three quarters of all services attending while government agencies and departments comprised the remaining quarter.

Accommodation services attending the event included the Department of Housing and Works and inner city Perth providers of supported accommodation for homeless single men and women including 55 Central Inc, St Bartholomew's House and UnitingCare West. Other accommodation services attending included Perth Foundation Housing, Passages Resource Centre and YMCA HQ. Accommodation services were able to offer short-term crisis accommodation to homeless guests. The Department of Housing and Works conducted priority access interviews on the day as well as providing a broad range of other forms of assistance to guests including interviews for wait listing and bond assistance.

Legal services and practitioners included the Tenants' Advice Service, Scales Legal Advice, the Youth Legal Service and Consumer Credit Legal Service. Two individual practitioners also attended.

Thirteen health services attended the event including Medicare Australia, the Perth Primary Care Network - Street Doctor, Inner City Community Mental Health, Lions Hearing Clinic, the Mobile GP, South Metropolitan Public Health, the WA Optometry Association and FPWA Sexual Health Services. Several drug and alcohol services including Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Services, North Metro Community Drug Service and WASUA - WA Substance Users' Association attended.

In addition to the provision of information, health practitioners also provided general practice services, physiotherapy-based massages, hearing and eye checkups. Outreach and support services for homeless people in Perth included the Ruah Centre, the UnitingCare West's Tranby Centre, Anglicare WA's Step1 Street Work Program for young homeless people, The Salvation

Army's Genesis centre, Manna Industries, Red Cross Community Services, the Noongar Patrol and St Patrick's Community Centre.

Centrelink provided a large team of support staff for the event and conducted over 50 interviews in relation to income support issues affecting homeless guests. A number of employment support services attended including The Big Issue, and Anglicare WA's JPET program. These services assisted guests with information about possible career pathways and skills recognition courses. The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, the Child Support Agency and the Australian Electoral Commission provided specialist services including the direct provision of birth certificates. Lifestyle and basic needs services included the provision of food, Citiplace Hairdressers haircuts, hot showers, the Donation Distribution Shop and Reflexology. The kitchen served a three course meal comprising pumpkin soup, roast beef and vegetables and an apple crumble and custard dessert. Five hundred meat meals were served in addition to additional vegetarian and special dietary meals. Art, crafts, Christmas card writing, music and Indigenous dancers also contributed to the event's success.

A full list of agencies that registered before the day is included in Appendix 1 to the report. A number of other services also turned up and provided support on the day.

As part of the Homeless Connect evaluation, we conducted a survey of service providers. Of the over 50 service providers attending Homeless Connect, 38 completed the survey. Around a third of services who completed the survey were services who provide support to homeless people as their predominant activity.

The total number of instances of support provided by those completing the survey was 1,749. This figure excludes services not completing the survey (13 in total) and the provision of clothing and footwear which was accessed by the vast majority of guests. This indicates that the total likely number of instances of support well exceeded 2,000.

Among respondents to the service provider survey, the median number of instances of assistance for a given service provider was 20. Accommodation and housing services provided 184 instances of support, Indigenous services 230 instances of support, health services 339 instances of support, employment agencies 85 instances of support, Centrelink 50 instances of support, youth services 45 instances of support, legal support agencies 42 instances of support and all other respondents together 768 instances of support (including 500 meals, 115 meals and 24 showers).

GUESTS

Determining the exact number of guests who attended Homeless Connect is difficult due to the imperfections in data collection explained previously. A tally of entrants was not possible and the open layout of the event made counts difficult to maintain.

The total number of guests receiving ticket books was 250. These books ran out well before the

end of the event. Using this number as a base and judging from the number of meals prepared and guests estimated to have accessed the Donations Shop, we estimate that around 350 guests attended the event. Of these, 132 were interviewed for the feedback survey. The results presented below are based on completed guest surveys.

Gender

The majority of guests attending Homeless Connect were men (63 per cent), who outnumbered women (34 per cent) almost exactly 2:1. The relatively high proportion of male guests reflects the fact that a key target group for the event were those living on the streets and sleeping rough; a group which is more male dominated than the broader homelessness population. The broader homeless population includes women escaping domestic violence who are provided with support in women's refuges. They make up a significant proportion of the overall homeless population.

Age

As evident in Figure 1 below, the most common age group of guests was the 35 – 54 age group, who accounted for 47.3 per cent of guests. This was followed by the 25–34 age group with 22.9 per cent, and the 55+ group, 12.2 per cent. Those 24 and under accounted for only 11.4 per cent of guests.

Figure 1: Survey of Homeless Guests, Age Distribution, 2008 Homeless Connect Perth

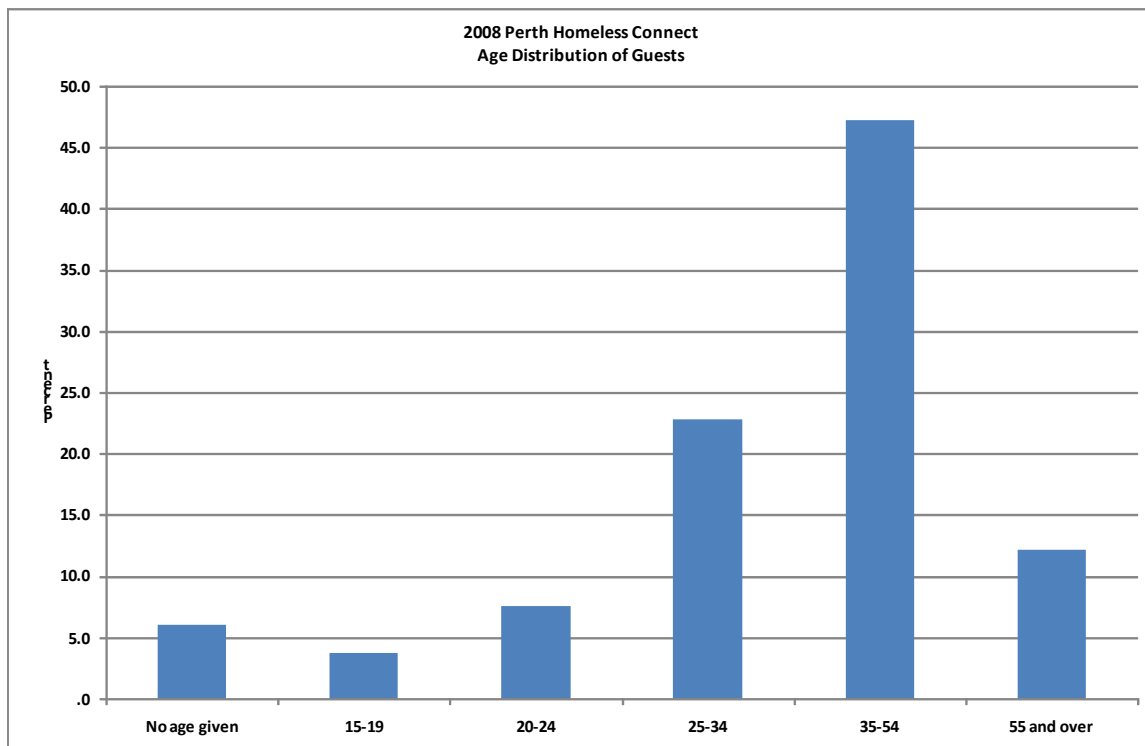


Figure 2: Survey of Homeless Guests, Housing Position of Homeless Guests, 2008 Homeless Connect Perth

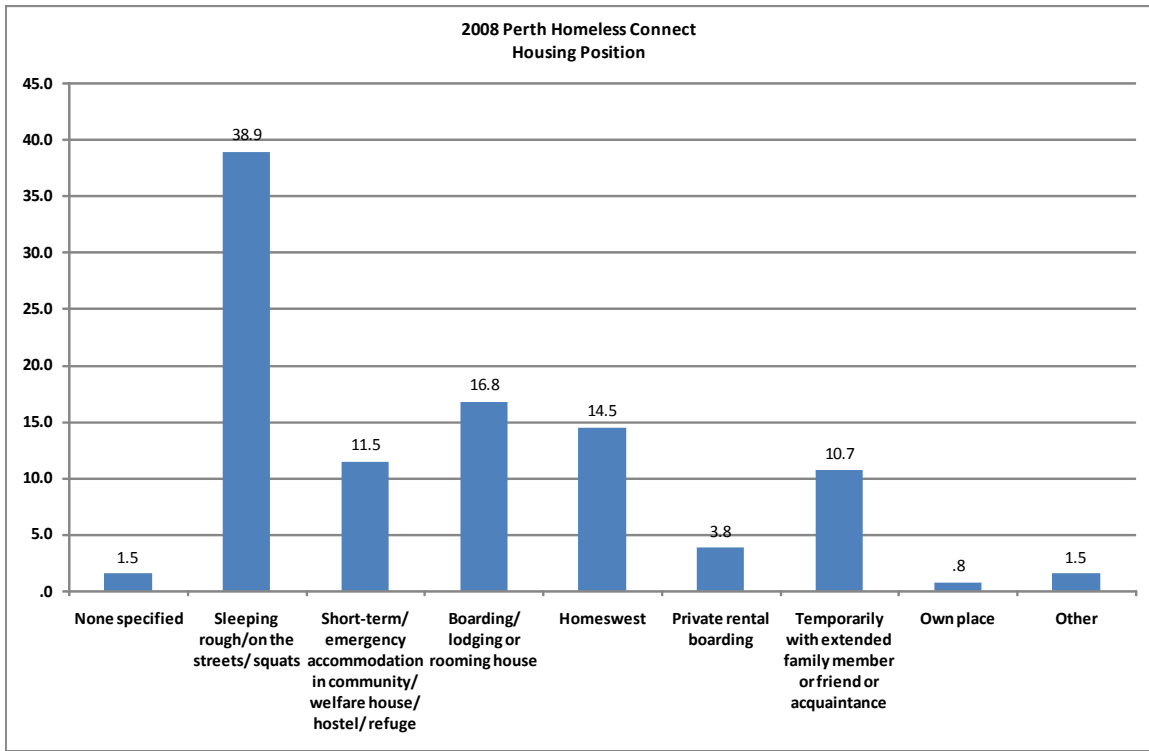
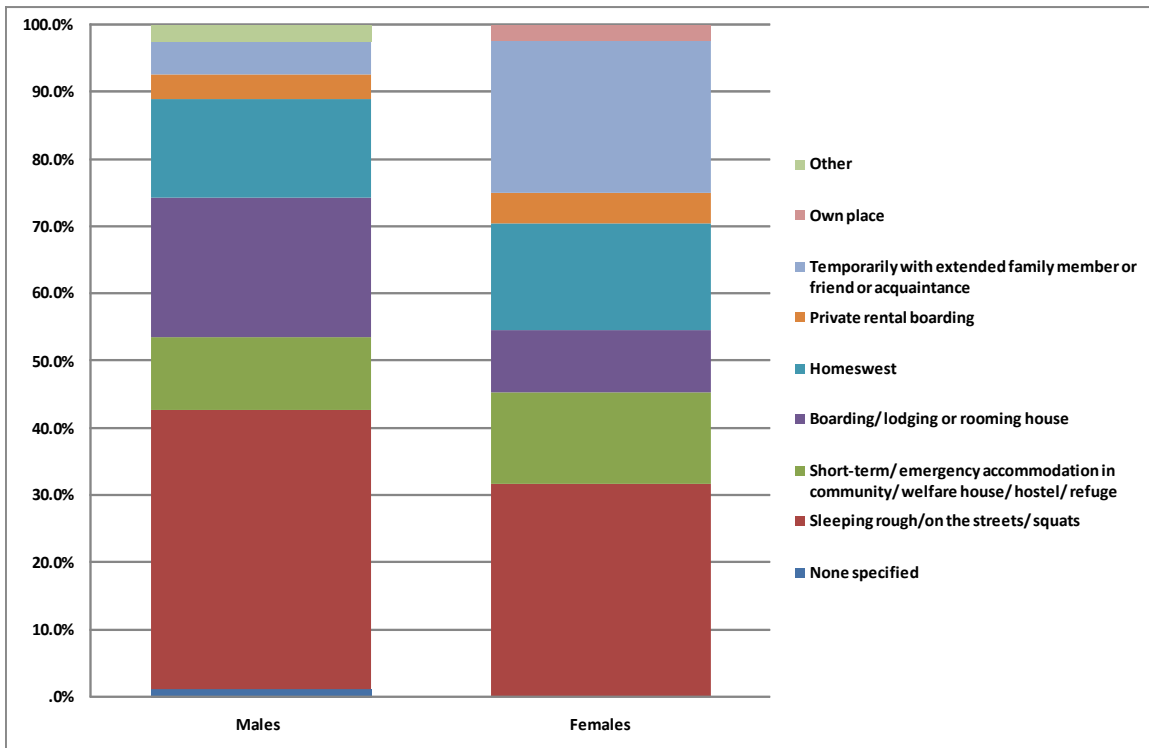


Figure 3: Survey of Homeless Guests, Housing Position of Homeless Guests by Sex, 2008 Homeless Connect Perth



The Accommodation Status of Homeless Guests

Guests were asked to list their current housing position. Sleeping rough or on the streets was the most common accommodation status accounting for 38.9 per cent of guests surveyed, followed by boarding/lodging or rooming house (16.8 per cent), Homeswest housing (14.5 per cent), short term emergency accommodation (11.5 per cent) and staying with friends or family (10.7 per cent). Using estimates of the number of rough sleepers in Perth at the time of the 2006 Census (767 in Perth), we estimate that around 20 per cent of all of Perth's rough sleepers, and a considerably higher percentage of the City of Perth's rough sleepers, attended Homeless Connect.⁵ Guests who were privately renting or owned their own home made up a very small proportion of all guests at Homeless Connect.

Men were more likely to rough sleeping and staying in boarding and lodging houses than women. Female respondents were more likely to be living temporarily with friends and relatives than men.

The housing profile of guests reflects the profile of street present people and those frequenting day centres. It provides confirmation that the event was effective in reaching its target group.

Sources of Information

The most common means by which guests found out about Homeless Connect was through community or welfare organisations, with 48.1 per cent of guests hearing about Homeless Connect through these organisations. Many homeless people, but particularly rough sleepers, frequent these services on a regular basis and were made aware of the event through a combination of poster displays, invitation flyers, pamphlets and general discussion in the lead up to the event. Some guests also commented that they attended Homeless Connect because these services were closed on the day and had alerted guests that they would be present at Homeless Connect.

The simple word of mouth channel was the next most popular source of information about the event being cited by 36.6 per cent of guests. The popularity of these two sources of information point toward the existence of a strong street present network, or culture, which encompasses not just those living on the streets but also those who have since found accommodation, whether it be permanent or temporary. Those living on the streets constitute the core of this street present network, a fact that is reflected in the accommodation status of guests who attended. It is also through this street present network that many people experiencing secondary homelessness become aware of events such as Homeless Connect.

⁵ See the Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness *The Road Home, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (p. 4).

Figure 4: Survey of Homeless Guests, How did Homeless Guests Find out about Homeless Connect, 2008 Homeless Connect Perth

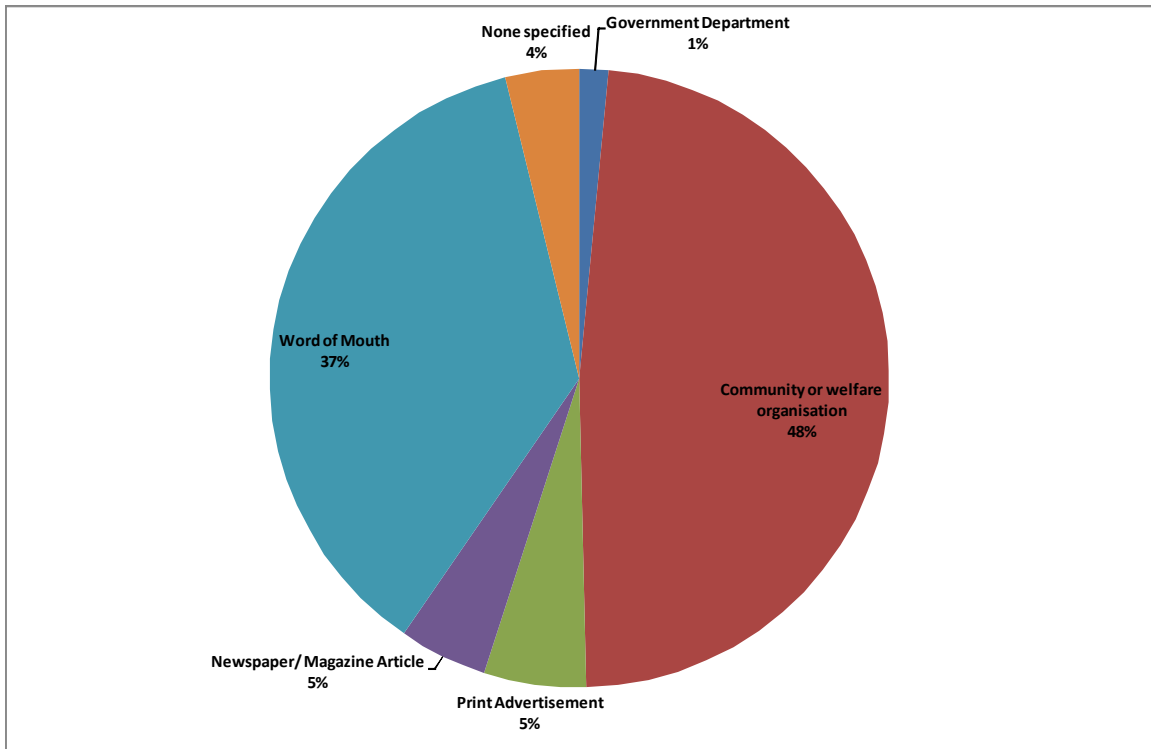
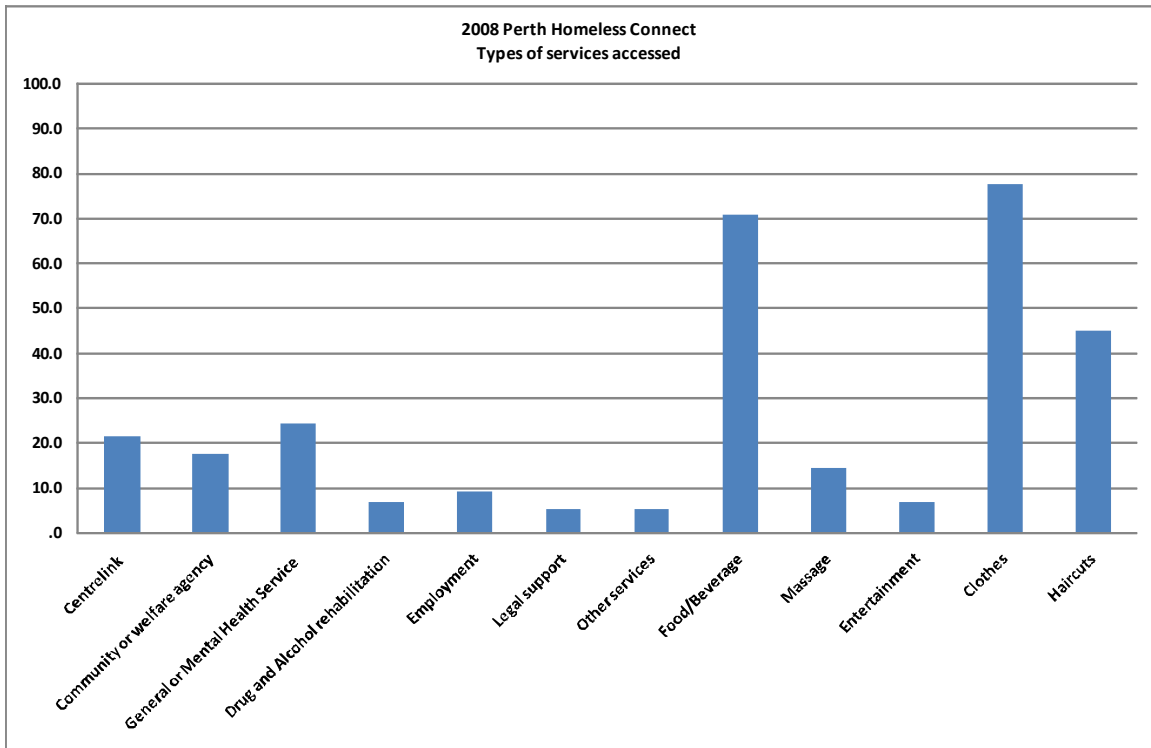


Figure 5: Survey of Homeless Guests, Types of Services Accessed, 2008 Homeless Connect Perth



Types of services accessed

Figure 5 provides a profile of the number of different types of services accessed by guests. The information presented relates to different types of services rather than to individual services. A guest may have accessed several service providers within a service type and therefore the data must be interpreted as indicative of the most popular types of services, rather than a definitive count of how many services guests accessed. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, there was no clear exit point for the event and guests may not have visited all services at the time of interview.

As evident from the estimates contained in Figure 5, the vast majority of homeless guests had accessed food/beverages and the Donations Distribution Shop at the time of interview; close to half had also had a haircut. Around 20 per cent of homeless guests had also visited Centrelink, health services and community and welfare services.

VOLUNTEERS

One of the most pleasing aspects of Homeless Connect was the large number of people who volunteered to assist before and on the day. Around 150 volunteers assisted in the Homeless Connect Perth event. Around 30 volunteers were turned away because of the overwhelming response to the event.

Guests and service providers commented on how well volunteers worked on the day. As one service provider put it, 'volunteers provided BRILLIANT service all day. They did some great work with homeless people'.

The reasons volunteers gave for volunteering was simply to assist homeless people, make a difference to someone's life, connect to people and to services and to learn about homelessness. Some volunteers spoke of fulfilling a desire to serve the community others of reconnecting with a sector they used to work in.

All volunteers registered for the event undertook training prior to Homeless Connect as a precondition for their involvement. In line with best practice in volunteer management, all volunteers were insured, received training and received a policies handbook outlining policies, procedures and practice.

Volunteers worked in all sorts of capacities on the day. Some worked in a meet and greet capacity, others showed guests where services were, linking them to appropriate agencies. In some cases where guests warmed to a one-on-one contact or needed that form of assistance, volunteers stayed with their guests throughout the event. Other volunteers scheduled and assisted service providers. Some volunteers assisted a small number of guests intensively, other assisted very many guests.

Many volunteers worked directly in a range of activities on the day including in the Donation

Distribution Shop, assisting with food, cleaning and washing dishes and preparing food, in clean-ups, providing showers and massages, in the cloakroom and in assisting the evaluation team with undertaking surveys of guests.

Total volunteer time provided on the day was around 1,800 hours. Using estimates of the value of a volunteer's time included in Duncan Ironmonger's 2008 study *The Economic Value of Volunteering in Queensland*, this time equates to a value of \$43,362. This is around the level of median full-time earnings of employees in Australia.

HOMELESS CONNECT PERTH OUTCOMES

The Homeless Connect Perth event provided significant benefits to homeless people, to services providing information, support and assistance to homeless people and to volunteers.

HOUSING

One of the most tangible benefits Homeless Connect was able to provide homeless people attending was access to crisis accommodation and to long-term housing options. The Australian Government's White Paper on homelessness released shortly after Homeless Connect Perth *The Road Home, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* on 21 December 2008, includes a commitment to offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020. The emphasis on achieving immediate and long-term accommodation for rough sleepers at Homeless Connect was a very important feature of the Homeless Connect Perth event.

Uniting Care West was able to provide five guests with crisis accommodation and set up six follow up appointments, as well as providing all guests who visited their stand and did not receive immediate accommodation with a sleeping bag. Twenty-four sleeping bags were distributed on the day. Other services such as St Bartholomew's and 55 Central also provided immediate crisis accommodation for those attending. After the close of the event, Uniting Care West remained behind with the CEO of Volunteering WA to assist one distressed elderly man aged 80 who had been sleeping rough on the streets. Although all known accommodation was full, after more than 14 phone calls, Uniting Care West arranged accommodation at their Fremantle centre for the gentleman for the next two weeks before he returned to America where his daughter was living and had agreed to accommodate him in her home. A number of guests commented that they would be following up with services following the event to help them find a place to live.

The Department of Housing and Works conducted 28 on-the-spot assessments for priority housing. Included in this number were nine interviews with people who identified themselves Indigenous and homeless. Applying for public housing through the Department of Housing and Works is difficult for homeless clients as the need for repeat visits and a valid mailing address can create barriers. Illiteracy can also create problems when filling in applications. By giving guests a more informal and immediate avenue to priority housing the Department of Housing and Works was able to make this process more user friendly for guests. The Department noted that more interviews could have been conducted if not for constraints on the space available for private interviews. From their end, several guests reported that a key outcome of the day was that they were assisted by getting 'on the priority housing list'.

In addition to priority access interviews, the Department of Housing and Works also discussed a

broad range of other issues with guests including bond assistance for the private rental market (15 enquiries), eligibility for and wait listing for public housing (20 enquiries), and 40 other enquiries in relation to other Department of Housing and Works activities. When guests were seeking immediate housing, the Department of Housing and Works was able to refer them to services which provided crisis accommodation, located in the next room.

CLOTHING, FOOD AND OTHER MATERIAL GOODS

Over 92 cubic metres of clothing, footwear and other material goods were distributed during Homeless Connect. This included second-hand clothing, footwear, toys, toiletries, books and linen. Centrelink staff in Western Australia alone donated 15,000 individual items such as shoes, toys, blankets and clothes. Many other individuals also donated items.

New clothes were also donated and are not included in the 92 cubic metre count. This included 25 cartons of clothing donated by King Gee, valued at \$15,000 and 75 pairs of boots donated by Blue Steel, valued at approximately \$7,500. Woodside Energy donated 150 woollen coats, Sodexo donated 200 Doonas and 400 sheets and Manna Industries donated 200 toiletry packs for men and women. The Perth Woolworths store donated 200 environmental-friendly carry bags and gift vouchers up to the total value of \$200. These donations were highly valued by the guests at Homeless Connect. Many guests walked away with several bags full of clothing and other items, which will help equip them with their 'fight to make a life' as guests commented. Small blankets, socks, sneakers, bras and sanitary goods were particularly sought after.

In addition to clothing, footwear and other material goods donations, there were some very large donations of food on the day. Millers Foods donated 25kg of flour, 5kg of sugar and muffin mix for 400 muffins together with 400 bread rolls. The Bell-Vista Group of Companies donated 10 kgs of onions, 15 heads of celery, 80 kg potatoes (peeled), 80kg pumpkin (peeled), 20 kg carrots, 6 cartons of fresh fruit for fruit bowls and 4 cartons of apples. Mondo Butchers and Carl Torre & Sons Butchers donated between them 100 kg of premium beef. Harvey Fresh donated milk, choc milk, iced coffee, iced mocha, custard and apple and orange juice.

Almost all guests indicated on their feedback forms that they had greatly benefited from access to a good meal on the day and to clothing and other goods. One guest commented that Homeless Connect had helped 'me with boots and it has done more for me in one day, than m[e]... trying to get something in one year.' Another guest indicated that the event 'cleaned me up. Gave me clothing to wear. Now I am on a [Centrelink] payment too'. Something as simple as a new set of clothes and pair of boots can vastly improve a person's self-esteem, as well as provide insurance against cold nights spent on the street.

EDUCATION, INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

Central TAFE saw 18 guests who enquired in relation to the different types of courses that Central TAFE offers. Fourteen guests filled out and returned a query form prepared by Central TAFE supplying their contact numbers for follow-up by Central TAFE. The study area that guests showed particular interest in was Community Studies particularly courses such as Working with Youth, Drug and Alcohol Licensing together with General Education studies that offer Literacy and Numeracy for adult learners. Preliminary follow-up has resulted in two homeless guests confirmed as prospective students in 2009.

On the day, Centrelink staff had 50 recorded contacts with homeless guests (a total of 65 attendances). As Centrelink was linked to its own data systems, staff were able to deal directly with outstanding and new issues affecting individual guests. These issues ranged from changes of address, form lodgement, banking difficulties, job network member appointments, job capacity assessment appointments and any issues affecting payments. The latter included, for example, information Centrelink had requested from individual guests and interviews they may not have attended.

In addition to sorting through income support issues, guests were provided with information on job opportunities and access to training and support. One guest commented that Homeless Connect had given him directly 'some job opportunities and agencies to see in terms of employment'.

HEALTH

Health services were able to provide on-the-spot free care for guests including eyesight and hearing tests as well as provide information on a broad range of issues and needs. Information was provided by services on sexual and reproductive health; Medicare services; inner city mental health services, mental health referral mechanisms, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation options and referrals.

Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Services (AADS) had a significant presence at the event and provided information to Indigenous homeless people about where they were located and the services provided through AADS. They also provided flower essence therapy, music, art and Indigenous dancers.

The South Metropolitan Public Health unit went out with bags of chocolates and condoms and information on sexually transmitted infections receiving strong interest from young homeless people in particular. They also provided information on scabies, skin problems and other infectious diseases.

The Perth Primary Care Network, which runs the Street Doctor service, had doctors and nurses providing homeless people with confidential and private clinical care in relation to immediate

health needs as did the Mobile GP service. Mobile GP is a non-government, not-for-profit organisation with aim of improving health of homeless people by working in collaboration with other agencies. Free yearly membership to Family Planning WA was also provided.

IDENTIFICATION

The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages was able to provide 22 guests with information and birth certificates on the day. The ability to issue birth certificates on the day is of particular benefit to the homeless who often lack an address with which to receive items such as these through the post.

Between 8 and 10 birth certificates were issued on the day. Identification can be a major barrier for homeless people when attempting to access services. Many agencies require multiple forms of identification including passports, birth certificates, driver's licences and credit cards, all or some of which may not be held by homeless people. The provision of birth certificates at Homeless Connect Perth provides one primary form of identification which can then facilitate the securing of other forms of identification. This outcome could be built upon at future Homeless Connect events with the participation of the Department of Planning and Infrastructure providing proof of age cards. This is supported by the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages who noted that there were 'many requests for photo ID'.

ONE-STOP SHOP ACCESS TO SERVICES

Guests referred consistently to the benefit of having multiple services located in one area. Clients were able to access services they may otherwise had not known about or could not easily get too. Services are scattered throughout the city and often keep similar opening hours, meaning that clients needing to access more than one service are forced to travel distances in a designated timeframe. While this may not present problems to some, a lack of money, and transport, especially when services are located away from public transport routes, creates difficulties.

SENSE OF WELL-BEING

Contributing to guests' well-being was one of the aims of Homeless Connect and one of the major benefits guests were able to take away from the day. The responses from guests, service providers and volunteers was overwhelmingly positive with comments such as 'one should be held every three months, have never seen homeless people so happy' and 'it is great to see so much support and to see so many happy faces'.

Comments from guests included 'restored my faith in humanity 100%', 'All the mates living on the streets, I can see a difference, all happy and on their best behavior', and 'I was given many of the very things I needed to help me continue to fight to make a life for myself'. Another guest

commented that Homeless Connect had helped him 'with a birth certificate, info on housing, rehab, generally helped with morale boost, clothing and meals'.

The day succeeded in creating a connection between homeless guests and the rest of the community which is vital in empowering the homeless and reducing or dispelling feelings of social isolation. One service provider reported that guests had commented 'it's like Christmas' and 'it gives us a good day out of many bad days'. The 'friendly and non-judgemental' atmosphere allowed guests to relax and feel embraced with many staying for the entire day to socialise, not only with each other but also with volunteers and service providers'. Another service provider noted that the 'feedback from guests was very positive – felt it was very inclusive with no discrimination – a safe environment'.

The enhanced sense of well-being was felt not only by the homeless guests, but by volunteers and service providers. As one service provider put it, it was 'an awesome day, privilege to help and a humbling experience'. Another simply said 'inspirational'.

The enhanced sense of well-being derived from Homeless Connect is invaluable to those who experienced that feeling whether it lasts for a day or a lifetime.

NETWORKING

Networking between service providers was one of the key benefits of the day. The Homeless Connect 'one stop shop' model provided an opportunity for service providers to initiate face-to-face contact with each other, raising awareness of what other services are available to their clients and creating professional links for future cooperation.

As one service provider reported, the day 'raised awareness of services available – names to faces make a difference. Beginning of relationship building for the future.' Improving these relationships has the potential to facilitate a more streamlined approach to assisting homeless clients, who face unique difficulties in accessing some services. As one Homeless Connect guest noted 'Lots of people won't come [to seek support] because they get shunted around, they don't have enough ID. They get discouraged because nothing happens.' Homeless Connect enables service providers to establish avenues of information sharing in order to help address these issues unique to homeless clients. However, continued contact between service providers is required to maintain and develop these relationships so that genuine partnerships across service providers can be sustained.

ISSUES

The most common issue raised by service providers related to the suitability of the venue, with over one third of services surveyed highlighting it. A lack of space was the main concern with several service providers noting that guests felt uncomfortable with the services being located so close to each other. This impacted on the guests' willingness to engage in confidential

discussions with service providers for fear of being overheard. Significant concerns were raised by some service providers in respect to adherence to the Privacy Act. The disconnected nature of the layout was also perceived to be problematic, with some believing that the outside area was located too far away from the rest of the event. Several services suggested an outside venue such as Forrest Chase which was seen to be 'more user friendly' and where 'everyone [is] together rather than spread out as much'. Some services also requested more coherence in the grouping of services in order to aid referrals.

The issue of the appropriate venue is a difficult one. Citiplace Community Centre provides a number of fundamental advantages for an event like Homeless Connect including the fact that facilities for meals, showers and haircuts are available in the one spot and run by the City of Perth. The location is also close to open areas in front of the Art Gallery. This area was used particularly well on the day for a range of activities such as the Donation Distribution Shop, entertainment and a range of health, youth and Indigenous services.

Many volunteers and service providers felt that additional information needed to be supplied to volunteers in respect to the forms of assistance provided by service providers and what they did or could do for homeless people. The volunteers had difficulties 'not knowing specifically what each service provider provided' and felt that 'having the "Service Provider Guides" available prior to the day would've been helpful'. This would enhance the ability of volunteers to effectively match guests' needs with services available. Achieving this end was of course made very difficult by the late entrance into the planning process of service providers and the short planning window for the event.

Volunteers also suggested that more focussed training prior to the day would help. While information regarding Homeless Connect itself was well covered, volunteers noted that it 'left many "on the day" issues unanswered' and did not focus on 'what is needed on the day'. However, it was understood that as a first time event, this may be difficult. Suggestions for future training focused on team building- getting to know those within the assigned team better in order to facilitate cooperation on the day - and making use of task sheets to give a clear delineation of duties.

The launch proved problematic to several guests and to volunteers. One volunteer noted 'official guests [were] blocking entrance, I observed guests departing dining hall during official opening and had feedback from guests that this was an uncomfortable experience for them'. Another volunteer reported that 'some guests felt patronised and offended'. It was suggested that a pre-event official opening may be more appropriate, rather than conducting the launch an hour after the event opened. This may prevent guests feeling alienated and ensure guests have access to all areas of Homeless Connect at all times.

Other issues raised included:

- More advertising is needed prior to the event.
- The Department of Planning and Infrastructure should be present to provide proof of

age cards.

- Maps of the layout should be made available to all guests, volunteers and service providers.
- A bigger cloakroom is needed.
- Improvements were required within the communications area. There were problems with the photocopier on the day which created problems for service providers such as Centrelink.
- A dentist and podiatrist were frequently requested and their presence would have been highly valued.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Homeless Connect Perth was a very successful event. It was effective in reaching its homeless target group. It exceeded expectations in terms of the number of guests, service providers and volunteers attending and in the total number of services provided on the day to guests. The level of giving by businesses and individuals far exceeded expectations.

Most importantly, Homeless Connect Perth produced significant outcomes for the homeless of Perth. The immediate needs of Homeless guests were met, they enjoyed the day, and many were able to access accommodation and health services and resolve income support and other issues.

The event was conducted, as one service provider commented 'in a great spirit of co-operation, caring and commitment'.

A particular vote of thanks goes to the City of Perth and Volunteering WA for taking the decision to put on Homeless Connect and in bringing the event to fruition.

There was an overwhelming view of guests, volunteers and service providers that the event be held again; many felt that it should be held on a more regular basis. There are obvious significant benefits from holding the event more often. However, the planning required for a Homeless Connect event suggests that anything more than a twice yearly event is overly ambitious and that even a bi-annual event may not be sustainable. Some suggested aligning Homelessness Week with the Homeless Connect event.

Recommendation 1: *That Homeless Connect be held at least on an annual basis with consideration to be given to holding the event on a bi-annual basis. The collaborative model of joint planning of the event involving the City of Perth, Volunteering WA and service providers should be maintained for 2009 with the significant role played by volunteers and community donations continued.*

Recommendation 2: *That other major regional centres in WA be encouraged to consider holding Homeless Connect events on an annual basis.*

Recommendation 3: *Planning for Homeless Connect 2009 needs to take into account of issues raised with respect to the organisation and planning of the 2008 event. These included the need for certain services to have access to rooms which enable them to conduct interviews in private volunteers requiring more extensive training in what service providers do, and consideration needs to be given to a pre-start launch of Homeless Connect.*

An important finding from the Homeless Connect Perth event is that services and guests found the one-stop service model of Homeless Connect to be enormously beneficial. Recommendation 4 seeks to build on this feature.

Recommendation 4: *That service providers work together to implement one-stop open days annually in major inner Perth Homelessness Community Centres and in other like facilities in regional areas of WA. Such open days could be run quarterly through various community centres and be implemented on a model similar to that of Homeless Connect.*

Recommendation 5: *That the various service providers and agencies involved in Homeless Connect organise regular forums to examine and discuss issues surrounding joined up delivery of services to homeless people and the development of partnerships across housing, support, health, employment services and education/training.*

By the very nature of the Perth city base for Homeless Connect, the key groups of homeless people accessing the event were single adult men and women together with some young people. There is potential value in organising similar events for homeless families who may not frequent the City-based services and a special event also for women escaping domestic violence.

Recommendation 6: *That consideration be given to how the Homeless Connect concept can be adapted and run to assist homeless groups not well-represented at Homeless Connect Perth, principally homeless families and women escaping domestic and family violence.*

APPENDIX 1 SERVICE PROVIDERS

A wide range of service providers attended Homeless Connect Perth, numbering over 50 in total. They are as listed below.

Accommodation (6)

Department of Housing and Works
55 Central Inc.
Perth Foundation Housing
St. Bartholomew's House
UnitingCare West
YMCA HQ

Outreach/Support (8)

Anglicare WA - Step1 Street Work Program
Manna Industries
Noongar Patrol
Passages Resource Centre
Red Cross Community Services
Ruah Centre
St Patrick's Community Centre
The Salvation Army - Genesis

Legal (6)

Youth Legal Service
Tenants' Advice Service
Scales Legal Advice
Catriona MacLeod, Senior Associate (Solicitor), Cullen Babington Hughes Lawyers
John D'Angelo, Barrister, John Toohey Chambers, Perth
Consumer Credit Legal Service

Health (14)

Inner City Community Mental Health
Lions Hearing Clinic
Medicare Australia
Mobile GP
North Metro Community Drug Service
Perth Primary Care Network - Street Doctor
South Metropolitan Public Health
WASUA - WA Substance Users' Association
WA Optometry Association

FPWA Sexual Health Services
Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Services
Physiotherapy
Massage
S.P. Family Planning

Education and Employment (7)

The Big Issue
JPET - Anglicare WA
Centrelink
Central TAFE
Career Development Centre
Atwork Australia
PEP Community Services

Lifestyle (8)

Create and Connect Corner
Flower Essences
Community Art
Reflexology x 2
Citiplace Hairdressers
Citiplace Rest Centre
Donation Distribution Shop

Other (3)

Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
Child Support Agency
Australian Electoral Commission

APPENDIX 2 HOMELESS CONNECT PERTH CHARTER

The following Homeless Connect Charter was developed by the Homeless Connect Reference Group.

MISSION

The mission of Homeless Connect Perth is to rally support and create lasting solutions for homeless people within Perth.

THE GOALS OF HOMELESS CONNECT

1. Improve access to services and housing for homeless persons in Perth.
2. Engage and increase the collaborative involvement of homeless consumers, business, non-profit community, and individual volunteers to work together to create solutions to homelessness.
3. To improve the system of care by creating opportunities for collaboration and sharing of best practices among Perth's homeless provider community.
4. Leverage private, corporate and foundation money and in-kind support to augment efforts to increase housing options and build service capacity for homeless persons in Perth.

THE OBJECTIVES OF HOMELESS CONNECT PERTH ARE TO:-

1. Consolidate available services and connect homeless individuals to benefits, care, counselling and other services which can assist in immediate and practical ways and can lead to pathways to shelters, social/affordable housing and self sufficiency.
2. Demonstrate civic leadership by bringing together a community coalition of government, business, not-for-profit and non government organisations to homeless people.
3. Better connect the various services in the homelessness sector with each other.
4. Raise awareness and inform the broader community of homeless issues.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES INCLUDE:-

1. Immediate results for homeless people including accommodation, medical attention, legal assistance and counselling.
2. An opportunity for businesses and residents to provide practical help to homeless people.
3. An opportunity for service providers to collaborate around the needs of actual individuals requiring assistance.
4. Social inclusion of those most disadvantaged.
5. Engagement of volunteers.

THE PROJECT HAS BOTH SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM BENEFITS:-

1. Connecting homeless people to the benefits and services that they immediately need.
2. Offering pathways to housing options and self-sufficiency.
3. Bringing Perth's fragmented access to homelessness services together in one spot and delivering seamless solutions.
4. Better understanding of homelessness issues in the wider community.