A place to call home.

Working to overcome homelessness
‘John’s’ hoarding had reached the stage where he was about to be evicted from his government housing unit. The housing department contacted Red Cross to work with John in a last ditch attempt to help him avoid eviction.

“Well I’ve got bit of obsessive compulsive behavioural thing happening,” says John. “I tend to compensate, by grabbing stuff and surrounding myself with what I consider objects of value but which just turn out to be cluttering up my living environment.”

John has made huge progress and has cleaned out three of the rooms of his unit so that they can now be used again.

“It’s taken a long period of time to do it but I’ve had the support of Red Cross to do it and that’s been really important,” says John.
Everyone deserves a safe and secure home

Red Cross believes that housing is a basic human need that supports a person’s inclusion in society and supports their wellbeing.

What Red Cross does

• Red Cross is preventing people from becoming homeless as well as supporting people who are homeless to access and maintain housing by providing programs and services.
• Red Cross recognises the distinctive aspects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homelessness and patterns of mobility. We work with Indigenous organisations and, where Red Cross is involved in providing responses, ensure culturally sensitive programs and initiatives are provided.
• Red Cross works in collaboration with communities and other organisations to address homelessness.
• Red Cross seeks to persuade decision makers and opinion leaders to address the causes of homelessness so that improved systems support people to remain housed.

Impacts of homelessness

The impact of homelessness can be extreme. Connection to family, friends, workmates and community is often lost or severely strained. People who experience homelessness can be shut out from mainstream social and economic life, finding it difficult to hold a job, study or participate in social and recreational activities.

People who are homeless tend to have poorer health, a significantly elevated rate of substance abuse and higher rates of mental illness than the general population. They are also more likely to experience violence and to be imprisoned.

The children of families who are homeless are particularly vulnerable. They are more likely than other children to experience developmental issues and disrupted schooling. This can lead to family patterns of disadvantage and exclusion being repeated.

Each day nearly 1 in every 200 Australians is homeless
Ingrid’s story

Ingrid knew that living with her family was no longer ideal for herself and her two little children. Determined to make a new life with a home of her own, Ingrid turned to Red Cross and met Homestay Caseworker Karen Dunn.

“I was spending most of my children’s money on my Aunty’s house. There would be times when I would break down and drink.”

Having lived with family for some time, Ingrid didn’t have a strong rental history and had many applications rejected. She says she almost gave up, but Karen said “no keep going”.

“I thought it wasn’t going to work and would slacken off. I’d ring Karen and tell her excuses. She wouldn’t believe me. She’d come over and wait for me to get ready and go,” Ingrid says.

It took nearly a year, but the persistence paid off. Ingrid found the perfect home through a network of Townsville real estate agents that Red Cross has developed.

“I didn’t think they would give me a place, so when I got it I was so happy. Karen was there for support, but I did everything on my own.”
From the age of 14, ‘Slide’ couch surfed her way between different homes. She now has a place she can call home and is ready to help others facing similar situations through Red Cross.

“Going to school while looking for a job and a place to stay is often hard. It was tough getting work and not having somewhere to sleep, money really was limited.”

Since getting her own place, ‘Slide’ has a list of things she wants to achieve. “I have so many ambitions now. I’d like to get my poetry published and learn how to draw comics. I also want to use my drug and alcohol studies to actually help people that are struggling with drugs, alcohol and homelessness. That’s what brought me to Red Cross as a volunteer, to help others get out of difficult situations.”
Supporting people to maintain their housing and avoid homelessness

Homestay – supporting people to maintain their current accommodation or to access more sustainable accommodation. Currently provided in Qld.

Intensive Tenancy Support – supporting people at risk of losing their rental housing. Currently provided in SA in partnership with Hutt St Centre.

Private Tenancy Support – supporting people at risk of losing their private rental housing. Currently provided in WA.

Supporting people experiencing homelessness

Street to Home – supporting people who are homeless to live safely and develop pathways out of homelessness. Working primarily with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Currently provided in Qld.

Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (Homelessness workers) – supporting people who are homeless and living with a significant mental illness. Currently provided in Qld.

A Place to Call Home – supporting people experiencing long-term homelessness to secure public housing and develop the skills to maintain it. Currently provided in WA.

Homelessness Accommodation Support Service – linking people exiting homelessness services with housing providers as well as employment, health, finance and social integration services. Currently provided in WA.

Housing Support Mental Health Service – assisting people exiting mental health inpatient units to access and maintain long-term stable accommodation. Currently provided in WA.

STAY – supporting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to develop skills to maintain housing and to reconnect with family and social networks. Currently provided in Tas in partnership with Centacare.

Youth Homelessness and Reintegration Service – developing skills, social connections and employment opportunities for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Currently provided in Qld.

Almost one in four homeless people is under 18
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people comprise 2.4% of Australia’s population but make up 10% of Australia’s homeless population.

Building people’s life skills and community networks

The Young Centre – providing accommodation and intensive support for young people experiencing homelessness, with pathways to housing, healthcare, training and employment. Currently provided in Qld.

Streetwise first aid – providing national certification in first aid to people with low literacy, limited income or poor experiences with the education system, targeting people who have experienced homelessness. Currently provided Australia wide.

STAY Plus – volunteer mentors providing companionship and support to people who are re-establishing themselves after being homeless. Currently provided in Tas.

Providing information, resources and a meal

Soup Patrol – providing a regular hot meal and local service information to people in need. Currently provided in WA.

Roadhouse – providing information, advocacy support, assistance and a free meal six nights a week to individuals who are socially disengaged and who may be experiencing homelessness. Currently provided in the ACT.

The underlying causes of homelessness

People become homeless for a wide range of reasons; high rents, limited tenancy protection regulations, limited access to public housing and unemployment mean that many Australians are at risk of becoming homeless.

Personal circumstances such as family violence, mental illness, gambling problems, use of drugs and alcohol and family breakdown are also involved and push people towards homelessness.
William Solomon has lived on the streets on and off since he was a teenager but says he wanted to end his abusive lifestyle and settle down. His partner introduced him to Red Cross Case Worker Wilma Kemp and three months later he had a place of his own.

He’s gone from living in the park, “drinking and abusing his body” to a comfortable unit in Townsville’s inner suburbs and working towards a career as an artist.

“If I didn’t get off the street I’d probably end up dying with alcohol poisoning or drug addiction. I thought to myself that first night: this is a change William you have to do something for yourself.”
Daryl’s story

Daryl was one of 22 people who took part in a pilot session of an innovative Red Cross first aid program, targeted at people with experiences of homelessness. Weeks later he used his first aid training to save the life of a friend.

Jody Sachs, the Red Cross worker who helped develop the training course, says the flexible and relaxed structure that works with the abilities of the trainees, is key to the success of the program. “The essential part of the Streetwise first aid course is that, we’ve worked really hard to take all of the reading and writing out of the course content,” says Jody.

Daryl agrees that the way the course was presented helped his comprehension and gave him confidence when it came to being assessed. “It came across so easy, it was in language you understood and there was no high handedness,” says Daryl. “I know that I can do it, I’ve done it, I’ve got the certificate. I feel good you know.”

The skills Daryl learnt helped him when he came across a friend who had tried to take her own life. After finding their friend unconscious, Daryl’s first aid knowledge helped him and his sister take action to save her life.

“We put her in the recovery position so that she didn’t swallow everything because she had gear in her mouth because she’d been drinking, and all the gear came out of her mouth and we kept an eye on her until the ambos got there,” says Daryl. “She’s ok now which is good. Because I knew what to do, we saved her,” he says.
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