



Working to prevent homelessness

Everybody should have
a home that is safe,
secure and affordable

the
power of
humanity



100 YEARS
PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE
1914-2014

Working to prevent homelessness

The need

Red Cross believes that everyone deserves a home that is safe, secure and affordable. Tonight, unfortunately, one in every 200 people¹ living in Australia will not have a home that meets these standards.

Homelessness is an extreme form of social exclusion. Homelessness disrupts people's lives. Connection to family, friends, workmates and community is often lost or strained and people who experience homelessness can be shut out from mainstream social and economic life. This makes 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 increased rate of substance abuse and higher rates of mental illness than the general population. They are also more likely to experience violence and be imprisoned. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are particularly impacted and are far more likely to be homeless compared with other Australians.

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.

What we do

Red Cross has provided support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Australia for more than four decades and continues to develop new approaches to support people dealing with housing issues.

Four broad approaches underpin Red Cross homelessness services:

1. To support people to maintain their housing and avoid homelessness.
2. To support people to live as safely as possible while they are homeless and to develop pathways out of homelessness.
3. To build people's life skills, community networks and support them to take control of their lives.
4. To provide information, resources and meals.

This document may contain the names and/or images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have since passed away.



Facts

Homeless people in Australia:

105,237

44% 56%

Homeless children under 12 years old:
17,845

402 OF THEM ARE SLEEPING OUT

WHY ARE THEY HOMELESS?

- 23% DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE
- 16% FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES
- 15% HOUSING CRISIS
- 11% INADEQUATE HOUSING
- 06% RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN
- 05% HOUSING AFFORDABILITY
- 20% OTHER REASONS

WHERE ARE THEY STAYING?

- 06% Improvised dwellings, tents or sleeping out
- 20% Supported accommodation for the homeless
- 17% Staying temporarily with other households
- 17% Boarding houses
- 01% Other temporary lodging
- 39% "Severely" overcrowded dwellings

AFFORDABLE AUSTRALIAN RENTAL PROPERTIES FOR PEOPLE ON THE LOWEST INCOMES: Less than 1%

Figures: Australian Bureau of Statistics: Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, 2012. From polling of people seeking support from specialist homeless services - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Specialist Homelessness Services 2012-13, 2013. Anglicare Australia: Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot 2014



Photo: Australian Red Cross/Cathy Friel

From high-flying career to homelessness and back

The day Michelle Tyhuis packed her few remaining things into her car, and drove north with her partner and three young boys to the prospect of sleeping in a garage, was about the worst day of her life.

“We hit the road in my car with what money we could gather together, put a little bit of things in storage, but abandoned most of it which was very heartbreaking,” she says. “I suffer from severe anxiety and depression so the final day drove me a bit over the edge.”

Suddenly the family had joined the ranks of more than 105,000 people who are homeless on any given night in Australia. Michelle was determined to find a way out, but it proved to be a tough three months before they had a place to call their own again.

She accepted her best friend’s offer for the family to live in her garage in Townsville 1350 km away. Michelle says it was the only option left.

She had almost exhausted the support in Brisbane where she had grown up, was educated and went on to establish a good career then family of her own. Her high profile job in media in Brisbane had come to an abrupt end while on maternity leave when she became very unwell with asthma and mental health issues. This collided with relationship conflict and a financial crisis where mounting debts meant the family was unable to make rental payments.

In Townsville, with the family sleeping on air mattresses on the floor of the dusty garage, it was staff at The Hub in Townsville who pulled it all together for the family.

“The team at The Hub, led by Wilma Kemp was great getting us into accommodation quicker. They saw we were in dire need, and I had too much to handle by myself. They put caseworkers to help us which was wonderful and there were a couple that I worked with and they took me to emergency accommodation to look at,” Michelle says.

“Sleeping in the garage strained my relationship with my friend, the dust was not good for my chronic asthma, and the boys are pretty active and it was important for me to have a good accommodation for them.”

Addressing the root causes

One in every 200 Australians is homeless and the causes are many and varied: poverty, unemployment, domestic violence, a drastic shortage of affordable housing.

Red Cross caseworkers at The Hub identified several areas where Michelle needed support. They linked in with health professionals, legal services and relationship counsellors. They were able to find emergency accommodation, provided furniture to set up their new home, including white goods, beds, table and chairs, and food vouchers. Michelle says Red Cross played a crucial role.

“The emotional support I guess, having someone there I could ring up and say, ‘Look, I tried these guys, they’re not helping me. I’m falling apart.’ They were there, they were understanding and they guided me through the tough parts of it. And they advocated for me to make sure we were at the top priority of housing.”

“Things have got drastically better since then,” Michelle says with a broad grin. “Since we moved into the house we have the freedom and the space to calm down and regroup and look to 2014 to start again. The kids are in a new school and they love it.”

She set up a home media business, and when she was online she ran across an advertisement for a great job which she successfully applied for.

“I love the job. It’s really challenging and it contributes to my children’s future because it’s publishing children’s books, which is something I’m passionate about.”

Michelle says she’s happy to share her story with others and is passionate about helping others who have hit rock bottom.

“Have a belief in the future. If you have mental health issues like I did have heart. Be committed to getting the support you need because being alone doesn’t help. Having others to hold you up is what brings you through.”

Homelessness Services Hub, Townsville

The centre of a holistic range of services for people who are homeless, or at risk of being homeless, ranging from emergency relief to support tackling the complex underlying causes of their homelessness. The Hub, led by Red Cross, is an innovative model where a range of agencies work together to end homelessness in Townsville.

Impact

Last year, Red Cross supported more than 4000 people who were either homeless or at risk of homelessness. The support Red Cross provides not only helps people to find housing but prevents people from becoming homeless in the first place. The programs also help people to build their life skills and community connections. The goal is to address the underlying issues that contributed to their housing problems.

People experiencing homelessness

In 2013, we supported 2,180 people and their families. Just over half the people Red Cross supported were men (51 per cent) and 36 per cent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We helped them find suitable and safe accommodation through caseworkers. By targeting specific groups, including older people, young people, people experiencing mental health issues and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we are better able to provide the right support.

Sustaining tenancy

In the last year, Red Cross supported 1,360 people and their families who were at risk of homelessness.

The majority of clients were female (67 per cent) and more than one fifth of clients were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (22 per cent). Nearly half of all clients were aged between 35 and 64 years (49 per cent) and 41 per cent were aged between 18 and 34.

We supported people who were at risk of losing their rental property by negotiating with landlords, helping people to get their tenancy and rent payments back on track or finding more suitable accommodation.

We helped clients to manage the underlying issues which contribute to their housing problems, including income management, misuse of alcohol or other drugs, or with problems like compulsive hoarding.

Building life skills and community connection

Last year, Red Cross helped almost 700 people to take control of their lives by helping them develop better life skills and community networks. These people developed a range of skills and support including community connection and friendship through one-on-one matching with a volunteer, education and training support and first aid skills. These new skills make a big difference, helping people move out of cycles of housing crisis.

Serving meals to people on low incomes or experiencing housing problems

In 2013, Red Cross served more than 43,400 meals which meant that we were able to provide a reliable and regular meal for people who may otherwise go without – many of them homeless. While our volunteers and staff are serving meals, we also talk with people about other services and information that can help them to find stable accommodation and get life back on track.

People helped with housing:

2,180 

 **43,400 MEALS SERVED**

“Red Cross believes that everyone deserves a home that is safe, secure and affordable. Red Cross aims to make a difference by supporting people who are homeless to get and stay housed and for people who are at risk of homelessness to maintain their housing.”

Ian Coverdale, National Manager Red Cross Social Inclusion Programs

Homelessness Programs

Australian Capital Territory

Roadhouse
Streetwise First Aid

Queensland

Homestay
Street to Home
Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (Homelessness workers)
Youth Homelessness and Reintegration Service (YHARS)
Homelessness Services Hub
Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA)
The Young Centre
Streetwise First Aid
Brisbane Night Café

South Australia

Intensive Tenancy Support
Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA)
Streetwise First Aid
Compass

Tasmania

Streetwise First Aid

Victoria

Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA)
Streetwise First Aid

Western Australia

Private Tenancy Support
Homelessness Accommodation Support
Homelessness Mental Health Initiative
Assistance with Care and Housing for the Aged (ACHA)
Streetwise First Aid
Kalgoorlie-Boulder Short Stay Accommodation
Soup Patrol





Photo: Australian Red Cross/Sarah Landro

Finding his feet after falling from the high wire

Arthur Trostl was literally a high flyer – a circus trapeze performer and successful theatrical producer – before a series of crushing blows saw his life spiral downwards leaving him on the brink of homelessness.

The 63 year old has experienced more in his life than many of us can even imagine. Born in the United States into a family of circus performers, he became a trapeze artist before travelling with a circus to Australia.

Later while waiting to board a flight from Los Angeles to Hawaii to feature in a popular television police drama, a bomb went off, killing three people near him, and leaving Arthur with lasting injuries.

Arthur's career took another turn and he went on to become a large theatrical touring event agent, earning enough money to buy waterfront houses in Perth and Sydney. A divorce saw him lose much of the money, forcing another career change when he pursued another passion - building racing cars. The Global Financial Crisis hit and people weren't buying racing cars.

He bought a tool business, only to suffer another horrific injury, which left his legs and back crushed, and Arthur unable to work.

Then when his pension was cut off due to a change in the pension rules, Arthur found himself with mounting debts and unable to pay the rent. He was threatened with eviction and realised he was just a few days away from homelessness and joining the ranks of the one in every 200 people who are homeless in Australia.

Red Cross caseworker Sophie Exon from Private Tenancy Support Service, supported Arthur to get emergency financial and food relief, then to tackle ways of getting out of debt, including financial counselling.

"I can't imagine living on the street. It would be horrible," he says. "But Red Cross was there for me. Just having them there, sitting with me, having someone on your side, that really makes a difference. Once you start to feel like there are people out there helping you, you yourself start to get involved. You start to take control."

Arthur says he's gone from feeling overwhelmed and unable to know what to do, to planning ways to get out of debt. He is now busy cataloguing and selling his old tools on the internet.

"Red Cross and Sophie got involved, they started helping, and I said 'I can get a little bit of money here, a little bit there. I've got all this equipment I don't need anymore that I can sell,' and I started to take control."

Getting on top of his financescataloguing things to sell online.



Photo: Australian Red Cross/Sarah Landro

From sleeping rough to a home of their own

After several years of moving around, sleeping rough, couch surfing and sleeping in cars, friends Elisa Fowler and Thomas Wall say they are enjoying finally being settled into a home of their own.

For each of them, it was a long hard journey, before they presented at The Hub ready to live in something more permanent.

Elisa was the victim of a hit and run accident in Mt Isa which left her hospitalised for more than three months. Unable to walk independently, and with restricted movement in one arm, she says she was in and out of hospital, and sank into a lifestyle of excessive drinking, eating badly and with no control over her life.

Thomas says Elisa saved his life after he got into a fight in Mt Isa. His life had spiralled out of control when he lost his licence and his job, and was unable to face mounting bills.

They resolved to help each other out and that's exactly how things panned out.

Elisa went into rehab, dried out, and with support from Thomas, is following a better diet and exercise regime.

They had been sleeping in cars and parks for a couple of months before Red Cross case workers interviewed them in one of Townsville's parks one day. Thomas and Elisa are just two of the more than 1370 homeless people Red Cross works with in Townsville each year.

Red Cross worked closely with the pair across a range of complex issues, assisting them into emergency accommodation, then helped them find a permanent ground floor unit which is perfect for Elisa to get around in, with a small garden where Thomas is enjoying growing vegetables and herbs.

"Red Cross helped us out big time," Elisa says. "Before I would just let things drag.

She says as well as helping out with material things like furniture, a fridge, beds, and food, Red Cross helped them break destructive habits.

"My advice? You can get a place and there are people to help you. You think you're alone but you're not. There are people out there like Red Cross who can help you. They'll help you out," says Elisa.

With Elisa and Thomas having stable housing, Red Cross has closed their case, but the friends still like to drop into The Hub to say hello and have a cuppa.

Red Cross worker Vicki Fords drops in for a visit to Thomas and Elisa's home.



Photo: Australian Red Cross/Cathy Friel

Fundamental Principles

In all activities, Red Cross staff, members and volunteers are guided by the following Fundamental Principles.

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace among all people.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary Service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

"Many people with mental or physical health issues, vulnerable young or elderly people, new migrants escaping trauma and poverty or women and children fleeing domestic violence need additional support while they rebuild their lives. Focusing on housing alone will not address the complex needs of these vulnerable people. They also need counselling; referrals to health professionals; help finding work or training or sorting out conflict with neighbours or family members, debts, legal problems, social security entitlements or budgeting,"

Glenda Stephens, CEO Homelessness Australia

Red Cross believes everybody should have a home and we're playing our part to help more people get access to a safe place to sleep at night. You can help Red Cross to get hundreds of people off the streets and support thousands more who are facing homelessness.

Donate now at redcross.org.au



Photo: iStock.com/Pixel_Pig

Be part of the great Australian story

As part of the world's largest humanitarian movement, Red Cross has been part of the fabric of Australian life for 100 years.

As a past, current or next generation supporter, you can help shape this great Australian story of people helping people in crisis for the next 100 years.

How can I become a supporter?

Red Cross relies on committed volunteers and donors. You can support Red Cross by: giving monthly; leaving a bequest in your will; making a one-off donation; or giving blood, by visiting redcross.org.au or calling 1800 811 700.

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