



National Institute of Labour Studies  
Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia



# Finding Work: Homelessness and Employment

National Institute of Labour Studies, Flinders University

Hanover Research Services

Kostas Mavromaras, Debra King, and Kirsten Macaitis (NLS)  
Shelley Mallett and Deb Batterham (Hanover)

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### Project Team

Kostas Mavromaras  
Debra King  
Kirsten Macaitis  
Shelley Mallett  
Deb Batterham

### Contact details

Debra King  
e: [deb.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:deb.king@flinders.edu.au)  
p: 08 8201 3164 f: 08 8276 9060

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# Executive Summary

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**Year:** 2011

**Project title:** Finding Work: Homelessness and Employment

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Kostas Mavromaras

**ADDRESS:** National Institute of Labour Studies  
Flinders University  
GPO Box 2100, Adelaide SA 5001

**KEYWORDS:** homelessness, disadvantage, employment, JSA, social enterprise

**OBJECTIVES:** This research is a pilot study that investigates the issues faced by jobseekers experiencing homelessness during their search for work. The findings are based on information from interviews with 32 jobseekers and 17 service providers from five Job Services Australia (JSA) organisations, two specialist homelessness services, and two social enterprises. The research contributes to the development of an evidence base for use in developing effective policies to assist this group of jobseekers. The study addresses four questions:

1. What are the personal, social, and structural barriers to employment faced by homeless jobseekers?
2. What actions can help to overcome these barriers?
3. How did homelessness and employment services assist homeless jobseekers to address these barriers?
4. What are the implications of the research findings for policy in relation to homeless jobseekers?

As a pilot study, the research also aimed to identify which issues relating to homelessness and employment require further investigation.

## RESULTS:

1. Homelessness may be a long-term barrier to employment. The commonly applied cultural definition of homelessness, based on minimum community standards, does not capture the impact that the experience (past or present) of homelessness has on jobseekers.
2. Social barriers to employment are difficult to address using employment-service models that primarily focus on changing individual capacities. Social barriers that jobseekers faced that were identified in the research included:
  - a. the notion of the ideal jobseeker which underpins employment pathways;
  - b. a lack of supportive social resources and social capital;
  - c. difficulties in gaining access to services and discontinuity of service provision;
  - d. the stigma of homelessness which results in non-disclosure to service providers; and
  - e. structuring employment services around the needs of the employer, rather than the jobseeker.

3. The co-ordination of services required to address the vocational and non-vocational barriers to work were mostly based on the networks and resources of individual service providers, rather than being formally institutionalised within organisations. This affected the consistency and usefulness of services.
4. Employment service provision for jobseekers experiencing homelessness appears to be constrained by the contractual arrangements through which service funding was tied to quotas and set outcomes. The allocation of the (often extensive) time required to work with clients with complex barriers was in constant tension with the need to maintain the commercial viability of the organisation.
5. The goal of full-time, continuing employment is desirable (and often desired), but is not always achievable for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. Flexible pathways are required that extend sustainable employment options both within and outside mainstream employment, including expanding the network of work-integration social enterprises. This includes recognising that pathways generally viewed as transitional may well be the end point for some jobseekers; finding work that provides an income which subsidises government benefits can be a successful outcome.
6. Linking training opportunities to employment is likely to increase the level of engagement in employment pathways, and prevent jobseekers entering a cycle of continuous training to meet indicators of job readiness.
7. The personal and social barriers that impacted on homeless jobseekers' capacity to find work also impact on their capacity to sustain employment. Specific strategies are required to keep people with complex barriers in the workforce. This would involve working with employers as well as employees.
8. At present, employment-service models are based on the assumption that a successful outcome for homeless jobseekers is independence from financial or service support. While this is clearly a possibility for some homeless jobseekers, others are particularly disadvantaged in these models: they do not have the social capital needed to attain or maintain successful integration into work. Developing services that recognise the need for *interdependence* between the homeless jobseeker and the service provider and the broader community would fundamentally shift responsibility for finding and maintaining employment from the homeless jobseeker alone to the jobseeker, employer, and service provider. This would: remove some of the stigma associated with jobseeking and homelessness; help jobseekers to develop the social capital required to find and sustain work; and work towards engaging the community (including the business community) in taking responsibility for addressing homelessness.

The findings from the pilot research have implications for policy and research directions. Further research is required to understand (a) the long-term impact of homelessness on employment; (b) the impact of funding models on service integration and employment outcomes for jobseekers experiencing homelessness; and (c) the role of employers in shaping ideas of job readiness, and providing employment opportunities to jobseekers experiencing homelessness.

This study can inform policy decisions with regard to (a) changes to the JSA assessment process to recognise homelessness as an ongoing barrier to employment; (b) providing a more efficient and formalised process for service integration; (c) focusing services more on the needs of the jobseeker, rather than the employer; (d) engaging employers in creating more flexible and secure employment pathways; and (e) reframing the discourse of jobseeking around interdependence and seeking ways of engaging the community and service-provider organisations to act as advocates for the jobseekers who are experiencing homelessness.

# 1 Introduction

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## 1.1 Background

### 1.1.1 Context of the research

Following the election of the Federal Labor government in 2007, and the release of *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness* (Homelessness Taskforce 2008), homelessness received unprecedented attention in the national social policy agenda. *The Road Home* identified the need for specialist homeless services and mainstream services to work together, so that people who experience homelessness can move into long-term housing and, *at the same time*, they can reconnect with education, employment, and the community. As part of the reform agenda, two employment-focused strategies were identified: (a) establishing a network of 90 Community Engagement Officers to improve access to Centrelink services for people at risk of homelessness; and (b) developing a workforce-development strategy for specialist homelessness services. *The Road Home* also resulted in the development of a funded national homelessness research strategy to inform the development of evidence based policy service delivery. Funded through this strategy the current research project aims to provide better information about how people experiencing homelessness use specialist and mainstream employment services.

### 1.1.2 Background

Employment is a critical means to promote and achieve the social inclusion of people experiencing disadvantage, including people who are homeless. Employment can help to break the cycle of homelessness (Ratcliff, Shillito, and Poppe 1996) by providing people with the necessary income, self-esteem, and sense of community connection to enable them to access and, importantly, to maintain stable housing. Until relatively recently, homelessness has received limited, if any, attention, in the design and delivery of employment services. The current system delivered through Job Services Australia (JSA) and funded by the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) incorporates the need for specialist service provision for particularly disadvantaged jobseekers, including specialist homelessness service providers.

Finding and keeping employment can pose a serious challenge for people experiencing homelessness and for the agencies that work with them. This pilot study investigates the issues faced by jobseekers experiencing homelessness in their search for work and it contributes to the development of an evidence base for use in developing effective policies and practices to assist this group of jobseekers.

This section provides an overview of the literature on homelessness and employment, starting with the working definition of homelessness used in the study.

## 1.2 Purpose and Objectives

This research examined how homelessness (unstable housing) impacted on jobseekers' capacities to access, engage in, and maintain employment. In addressing this issue the perspectives of two key groups were sought: (1) unemployed people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and; 2) service providers working with homeless adults. The research addressed four key questions:

1. What are the personal, social, and structural barriers to employment faced by homeless jobseekers?
2. What actions can help to overcome these barriers?
3. How did (homelessness and employment) services assist homeless jobseekers to address these barriers?
4. What are the implications of the research findings for policy in relation to homeless jobseekers?

This pilot study aimed to:

- (a) identify ways in which policies and programs can be more effective in assisting jobseekers experiencing homelessness to engage in the labour market; and
- (b) inform the development of a broader research project focused on national and international models for assisting jobseekers who are experiencing homelessness into sustainable employment.

Ethics approval was gained for the research through Flinders University (SBREC No. 4979), as well as through several service-provider organisations, including Hanover Welfare Services.

## ***1.3 What We already Know about Homelessness***

### **1.3.1 Definition of homelessness**

Multiple definitions of homelessness are used in Australian homelessness research and social policy. These span literal definitions that conceive of homelessness as 'rooflessness', to those that focus on people's experience of the suitability and adequacy of their housing. Arguably, however, the most influential and accepted conceptualisation of homelessness across Australia is the cultural definition proposed by Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992, p.291). Adopted by agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), this definition is based on an identification of the minimum community housing standards that people currently have the right to expect. Chamberlain and Mackenzie assert that in Australia this minimum community standard is equivalent to a small rented flat with a separate bedroom, living room, kitchen, and bathroom. Within this definition, three levels of homelessness (primary, secondary, and tertiary) are identified as set out in Table 1.

Although the Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) model is suitable for analytical purposes, the research demonstrates that some people will identify as homeless even when they do not fit the above categories. Homelessness can therefore be a subjective understanding, based on an evaluation of whether a housing situation is detrimental to health, safety, security, or wellbeing (Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994 P1, S4(1-2), p.3).

**Table 1 Model of homelessness**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Minimum community standard:</b> equivalent to a small rented flat with a bedroom, living room, kitchen & bathroom                               |  |
| Culturally recognised exceptions: <b>where it is appropriate to apply the minimum standard, e.g. seminaries, gaols, student halls of residence</b> | Marginally housed: <b>people in housing situations close to the minimum standard</b>   |
|  | Tertiary homelessness: <b>people living in single rooms in private boarding houses without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure</b>                               |
|  | Secondary homelessness: <b>people moving between various forms of temporary shelter including friends, emergency accommodation, youth refuges, hostels and boarding houses</b> |
|  | Primary homelessness: <b>people without conventional accommodation (living on the streets, in deserted buildings, improvised dwellings, under bridges, in parks etc.)</b>      |

Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) p.291.

### 1.3.2 Terminology

The terminology used to describe people experiencing homelessness or at risk of being homeless is an important and sensitive issue. It is particularly sensitive because there are people who are statistically homeless (as in the model in Table 1), who would not *identify* as homeless. In recognition of this, the term ‘people experiencing homelessness’ is used in this report to describe the broader homeless population.<sup>2</sup> This reflects the preferred terminology used in the National Quality Framework consultations (Homelessness Working Group of Housing Ministers, 2010).

At a more specific level, the jobseeker participants in this research identified as being homeless either in the past or the present. When discussing the research findings we therefore use the term ‘homeless jobseekers’. This term is used in *The Road Home* (Homelessness Taskforce 2008), but its use was debated within the research team. When speaking of homeless jobseekers throughout the report we specifically refer to those jobseekers who either had experienced or were at risk of experiencing homelessness and who participated in the research.

## 1.4 Homelessness and Employment

Analysis of the 2006 Census identified 104,676 people—representing approximately 75,825 households—who were homeless on census night (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2008, p.viii).<sup>3</sup> As Table 2 illustrates, high proportions of the homeless population were unemployed or not in the labour force.

Depending on the accommodation type, between 50 and 65 per cent of the homeless population were not in the labour force, while 10 to 16 per cent were unemployed (compared to 5 per cent of the general population). It is noteworthy, however, that a small but significant number of people experiencing homelessness and staying in either boarding houses or with friends and relatives were in some kind of employment. A large proportion of those who were

<sup>2</sup> This is sometimes expanded in the discussion to include those at risk of homelessness.

<sup>3</sup> These figures are currently under review by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (see Pink 2011).

employed were in part-time employment. This marginalisation from full-time work appears to impact on average personal income. A pre-tax income of less than \$400 per week was reported by a large proportion of the adult homeless population: namely 55 per cent of those staying with friends and relatives, 74 per cent of those residing at boarding houses, and 77 per cent of those in marginal caravan accommodation (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2008, p.42). Data from the ABS indicate that average weekly housing costs for low income private renter households were \$194 per week (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008). It is clear that this income allows little opportunity to save the amount of money required to exit homelessness.

**Table 2 Labour force status by accommodation type**

|                     | Those in SAAP accommodation<br>(n =140,400) | Friends and relatives<br>(n = 26,278) | Boarding house<br>(n = 17,269) | Marginal residents of caravan parks<br>(n = 10,566) |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
|                     | %   | %                                     | %                              | %   |
| Employed full-time  | 3.2   | 28                                    | 18                             | -   |
| Employed part-time  | 5.3   | 13                                    | 11                             | 20  |
| Unemployed          | 23.5  | 10                                    | 13                             | 16  |
| Not in labour force | 67.9  | 49                                    | 58                             | 64  |

Sources: (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007, p.72; 2006 Census of Population and Housing, cited in Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2008, p.41). Note: Excludes persons under 15 years. 'Not in labour force' are people not actively seeking work.

Despite Australia’s low unemployment rates and strong economic growth over the past decade, there remains a group of highly disadvantaged people—especially those experiencing or at risk of homelessness—who remain disengaged from the labour force. While there are many reasons offered by the media, service providers, and policymakers for the difficulties experienced by homeless people in accessing, engaging in, and maintaining employment, explanations fall broadly into three categories: motivation to work, barriers to finding work, and engagement with service providers<sup>4</sup>. An overview of the key points from the literature relating to each of these categories is provided below.

**1.4.1 Motivation to work**

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness are typically described or stereotyped (for example, in the media) as unmotivated, resistant to services, and content to rely on income support (Camardese and Youngman 1996; Shaheen and Rio 2007). Community views about the causes of homelessness reflect these stereotypes, with lack of effort and poor decision making being perceived as the main causes (Batterham, Hollows and Kolar 2011). However, other research suggests that homeless adults are no less motivated or interested in work than other adults are (Porat et al., 1997). In one project with people aged 18 to 35 years who were looking for work and experiencing homelessness, the vast majority of participants (93 per cent) had worked in the past (Grace, Batterham and Cornell 2006). Further, a survey of current clients at Hanover’s homelessness services showed that after gaining secure housing, gaining employment was the next most common aspiration in the coming 12 months (Hanover Welfare Services 2009). Indeed, people experiencing homelessness will

<sup>4</sup> A discussion regarding the context-specific service relationship between jobseekers experiencing homelessness and JSAs is appears in Appendix 1.

often refer to themselves as unemployed rather than homeless, indicating the 'pivotal place that employment holds within their self-perceived needs' (O'Meara, 1995 cited in Nicholson 2008).

While people experiencing or at risk of homelessness may view work as a means to gaining financial and housing security, they are also very aware of the ways in which their living situations, education levels, and inability to cover the costs of looking for work influence their likelihood of finding and keeping a job (Perkins 2007).

### 1.4.2 Barriers to work

People experiencing or at risk of homelessness face a range of personal, social, and structural barriers in finding and keeping work. The relationship between these barriers is often complex and intertwined, and exacerbates the difficulties faced in participating in the labour market. From an analysis of the literature in this area, five barriers to work are consistently reported.

**Housing instability** is the most obvious factor affecting the capacity of homeless populations to participate in the labour market. When people are precariously housed, routine tasks such as attending to personal hygiene or having clean or appropriate clothes can be difficult to achieve on a regular basis. Meeting the presentational requirements for work or training therefore needs more time and effort than it would for people in secure housing. Further, the lack of a fixed address or accessible phone number can make it difficult for employers to contact jobseekers to let them know about interviews, shifts, or other workplace information (Bakos 2007; Broadbent 2008; Homelessness Taskforce 2008).

**Low income** or **income instability** have an impact on jobseeking in a variety of ways. Transportation to access work, or the medication and health services required to sustain participation in work; the need for child care for working parents is an expense which may not be feasible for people on low incomes or who have income instability (Acosta and Toro 2000; Grace, Batterham and Cornell 2006). People in this income cohort are also likely to be receiving public benefits, such as the Health Care Card, which may be removed if they engage in paid work for an extended period (Baxter and Renda 2011) thereby further jeopardising their sense of security.<sup>5</sup>

People experiencing homelessness are likely to obtain work that is low paid, casual, or intermittent. For example, many participants on the YP4 trial<sup>6</sup> had worked, but their past work experience was often in lower-paid and more highly casualised industries such as hospitality, retail, labouring, and factory work (Grace, Batterham and Cornell 2006). It is debatable as to whether such work is likely to help them to escape poverty. Furthermore, it has been argued that unsatisfactory employment is no better for an individual's psychological well-being than is having no job at all (Richardson 2002). Booth et al. (2002), for example, found that temporary workers in Britain received less training, lower wages, and reported lower levels of job satisfaction than their permanent counterparts did. Yet the debate around whether a bad job is better than no job is complex. Studies have also found that certain types of temporary

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<sup>5</sup> Yet another perverse incentive to remaining unemployed is the risk to eligibility for public housing.

<sup>6</sup> Yp<sup>4</sup> – Young People '4' purpose, place, and personal support is a trial program initiated by FaHCSIA to integrate services for young homeless jobseekers (Coventry 2005).

jobs can be a stepping stone to permanent work (Booth, Francesconi, and Frank 2002); and compared to persons not engaged in work, low-paid work is an indicator of improved future job prospects. Moreover, Booth et al. (2002) suggest that there is only weak evidence relating low-paid employment to repeated unemployment.

People who have been homeless for an extended period often have **complex disadvantage**, beyond housing or income instability, which creates multiple barriers to finding and keeping work. Within the homelessness and employment literature, several barriers are consistently identified: domestic violence, emotional instability, substance abuse, and lack of familial and (or) community relationships (da Costa Nunez 1995; Ratcliff, Shillito, and Poppe 1996); being a single parent, especially a single mother (Baxter and Renda 2011); being Indigenous (Cooper and Morris 2005); having a mental illness (Anderson, Boe, and Smith 1988; Calloway and Morrissey 1988; Backus 1996; Cook et al. 2001; De Castella et al. 2009; Gilmer et al. 2010); and having a disability (Trutko et al. 1998; Theodore 2000; Marrone 2005; Shaheen and Rio 2007). Researchers and commentators note that complex disadvantage affects not only whether particular jobseekers can find work, but also whether they can sustain work. Disadvantage in these cases is not simply cumulative, but its elements interact, creating new sets of barriers to be addressed. Examples of the complex nature of disadvantage are detailed through case studies on pages 18 and 19.

These forms of complex disadvantage exacerbate a jobseeker's capacity to acquire the necessary **human and social capital** for finding and keeping work. Human capital relates to education, skills, and work experience which are usually developed through continuous engagement with education and work throughout a lifetime. Many homeless people, however, experience vulnerable connections with secondary education and this in turn affects the types of jobs that can be applied for and the types of higher education or training that can be undertaken (Broadbent 2008). Among the long-term homeless population, having a consistent work history of greater than 12 months is uncommon (Tam, Zlotnick and Robertson 2003). The work histories of homeless jobseekers are often sporadic and inconsistent, thus limiting their capacity to develop skill sets and making it difficult to find supportive referees when applying for work.

The development of sufficiently strong relationships with employers to obtain references is an indicator of social capital. For a variety of reasons associated with complex disadvantage and the stigma of homelessness, jobseekers can find it difficult to build trusting relationships with employers or co-workers (da Costa Nunez 1995). When jobseekers experiencing homelessness engage with employment-service providers (and service providers more generally) trust has been identified as an issue which can inhibit the level of service that is provided (Camardese and Youngman 1996). Issues surrounding engagement with service providers are covered in more detail in Section 2.2.

The **structure of the labour market** is a major hurdle for jobseekers with complex disadvantage, especially for those experiencing homelessness. Over the past two decades the Australian labour market has become more skilled, with low-skilled jobs being part-time and limited to particular industries (for example, retail, care work, cleaning, hospitality), often requiring both VET level qualifications and a particular style of personal presentation (that is, for interacting with the public). This has led to a lack of opportunities for people seeking low-skilled, entry-level work; for those unable to meet the presentation requirements, even fewer opportunities for secure full-time employment exist (National Youth Commission 2008). This can lead to employment-service providers, especially those located within welfare services,

to draw on personal networks and their own agencies to provide opportunities (Henerson-Frakes 2004). Some agencies have explicitly sought to develop programs that provide work experience or transitional employment through social enterprises. Boyd-Caine (2010, p.4) defines social enterprises as:

organisations that use market-based strategies to achieve a social purpose. They range from non-profits using business models to pursue their mission, to for-profits whose primary purposes are social.

Social enterprises create opportunities for jobseekers to develop skills, improve their social capital, and increase their confidence. Barraket (2010) argues that social enterprises fill some of the gaps and failures in the current welfare system; they create opportunities for community engagement and new approaches to meeting current needs; and they provide models of business structures. Essentially, social enterprises are viewed as having the potential to unlock the cycle of poverty and change the face of traditional welfare models. However, as Boyd-Caine (2010) also argues, the tension between the social and economic bottom lines of social enterprises can lead to situations where, in engaging in non-mainstream work, social enterprises risk perpetuating the marginalisation of disadvantaged employees. As such, the long-term legitimacy of social enterprises in terms of their superiority over other forms of social intervention has yet to be determined (Dart 2004). Moreover, the act of measuring the long-term success of social enterprises is hindered by the difficulty of clearly defining what true social enterprise organisations are (Dart 2010).

Researchers have identified a need to develop or find pathways that can help jobseekers experiencing homelessness to move from the fringe economy into the mainstream labour force (Camardese and Youngman 1996).<sup>7</sup> However, as mentioned previously, this is likely to be difficult for jobseekers who are also single parents, have a mental illness or disability, or who experience other types of disadvantage. Exacerbating the difficulties of engaging in the labour market is the image of homeless people as being 'less than desirable job candidates' held by **employers** (Camardese and Youngman 1996). The actual extent to which employers hold these views is not known, and while Ratcliff et al. (1996) highlight the positive role that employers can have in engaging jobseekers experiencing homelessness in the work force, more information is required about how to optimise the employer side of the labour market for these jobseekers.

To conclude, this literature review identified that while housing instability creates a multitude of barriers for jobseekers, many are motivated to find work and look for assistance from employment service providers. The context-specific service relationship between jobseekers experiencing homelessness and JSAs is explored further in Appendix 1. This pilot study focuses on the interaction between jobseekers experiencing homelessness and their service providers in managing the pathways into employment. It seeks to ascertain the personal and structural factors affecting the transition into work for jobseekers experiencing homelessness.

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<sup>7</sup> As the specific role of low-paid work as a pathway from the fringe economy is outside the scope of this study (for more information see Booth, Francesconi, and Frank 2002; Richardson 2002; Buddelmeyer, Lee, and Wooden 2010).

## 1.5 Methods

### 1.5.1 Research process

Semi-structured qualitative interviews, of 30 to 45 minutes duration, were conducted with 32 adult homeless jobseekers and 17 service providers. Participants were recruited from nine services across South Australia and Victoria. There were four types of service providers: JSAs within welfare organisations, independent JSAs, social enterprises, and homelessness welfare services (Table 3). The spread of these service providers facilitated an exploration of differences between employment and homeless services, and between independent and welfare-related JSAs, and of the experiences of transitional employment in social enterprises. A sample framework for recruitment was devised from government lists of JSA organisations, and for homelessness and social enterprise providers, through the research team's networks. JSAs providing Stream Four services, particularly to homeless populations, were identified and contacted. If they were associated with a specialist homeless service, these were also invited to participate. The two social enterprises were selected for their focus as being to provide employment opportunities to people experiencing homelessness.

**Table 3 Overview of participating services**

|                                      | Number of organisations | Number of staff | State       |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Job Services Australia – Welfare     | 2                       | 3               | 1 Vic, 1 SA |
| Job Services Australia – Independent | 3                       | 6               | 3 SA        |
| Homelessness Welfare Service         | 2                       | 4               | 1 Vic, 1 SA |
| Social Enterprise                    | 2                       | 4               | 1 Vic, 1 SA |

Following agency agreement to participate in the research, information about the study was disseminated to relevant service providers. The providers identified clients in scope for the research—those who were over 18, experiencing or at risk of housing instability, and interested in finding work—provided them with an Information Sheet, invited participation, and provided a free-call number. Jobless participants were paid \$30 for their participation.

Recruitment of eligible jobseekers posed some difficulties. The process of obtaining ethics approval from service organisations delayed some recruitment. However, most importantly, some agencies found it difficult to recruit eligible clients, as these jobseekers did not always identify as homeless. Some service providers felt unable to approach potential homeless participants for fear of embarrassing or stigmatising them. Even some specialist homelessness JSAs had difficulty in recruiting their research quotas of homeless clients.

At the interview, participants were provided with a letter of introduction and a consent form. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured for jobseeker participants. Service provider participants were assured of confidentiality, but they were informed that their organisation or agency may be identified in the research report. For transcription, interviewees were not identifiable. The data were transcribed by a professional transcription service and analysed using NVIVO software.

### 1.5.2 Analysis

Researchers from NILS and Hanover met in January 2011 to formulate the coding framework for data analysis. Coding frames were organised according to participant group, and the

themes identified sought to capture the range of responses from the four categories of service providers. Interview transcripts were then coded by one researcher. Approximately 10 per cent of the transcriptions were co-coded to ensure validity of the coding frame. All jobseeker participants were provided with a pseudonym to protect their identity. References to service providers in the quotes are indicated by SP (service provider) and by type of organisation.

### 1.5.3 Characteristics of participants: homeless jobseekers

Table 4 provides an overview of selected characteristics of homeless jobseekers participating in the research. Of the 32 participants, 18 were located in South Australia and 14 in Victoria. Of the jobseekers in the research, 60 per cent were male, and the men were older (35 years) than the women (30 years). Overall, ages ranged from 17 to 58 years, with an average age of 33 years. Half of the interviewees reported that they had fairly good – good health; a quarter reported a mental health problem (which may or may not have been diagnosed). Five were from a non-English speaking migrant background, and three were from an Aboriginal background.

Fourteen jobseekers were currently in accommodation, however many of these felt and acted as though their housing situation was unstable. Of these participants, six were in a share house and could be classified as marginally housed; another two were living with family, but one of these said it was on trial; four were in public or community housing; the remaining two were in private rental properties.

**Table 4 Summary of selected homeless jobseeker characteristics (N = 32)**

| Homeless status at time of interview              | Age (years) | Gender      | Self-reported health    | Nationality / language                           | Level of secondary education | Post-school qual.                    | Income   |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|--|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Primary = 1                                       | 18- 25 = 10 | Female = 13 | Fairly good - good = 16 | Australian born = 20<br>(including 3 Indigenous) | Yr 12 = 9                    | Degree = 1                           | Newstart = 20<br>(including 7 wage supp)       |
| Secondary = 13                                    | 25 - 34 = 9 | Male = 19   | Medium / Average = 8    | ESB migrant = 6                                  | yr 11 = 6                    | Cert IV/<br>Trade = 3                | DSP = 4  |
| Tertiary = 4                                      | 35 - 44 = 4 |             | Fairly poor – poor = 6  | NESB migrant = 5                                 | yr 10 = 12                   | Cert III = 6                         | Youth allowance = 3<br>(including 2 wage supp) |
| In housing = 14<br>(includes 7 marginally housed) | 45+ = 8     |             |                         |  | yr 9 = 3                     | Cert II = 8                          | Austudy = 1<br>(including wage supp)           |
|   | Missing = 1 |             | Missing = 2             | Missing = 1                                      | yr 8 = 1                     | Forklift = 3<br>Other = 2 (training) | Wages = 3<br>Missing = 1                       |

Most participants (20) were on Newstart, with nine being on other forms of benefit and three relied solely on wages. In addition, of those on benefits, 10 (just over a third) supplemented this with wages. Over 70 per cent of homeless jobseekers had undertaken education or training since leaving school. Nearly half of these had qualifications at Certificate III or above.

#### **1.5.4 Characteristics of participants: service providers**

Three categories of service providers were sampled in this study: JSAs, Welfare Homelessness Services, and Social Enterprises. Within the JSA category, three independent for-profit organisations were sampled: Workskil, Job Maxima, and Finding Workable Solutions. All of the selected providers operated within a network of branches across South Australia and catered to homeless jobseekers as Stream Four clients in addition to Stream One, Two, and Three jobseekers. Two not-for-profit JSAs were included in the sample: Baptist Care (SA) Employment Services, and Hanover Employment Services. Both Welfare JSAs catered to homeless jobseekers among their wide range of clients, although Hanover Employment also held a specific homelessness contract within the JSA network.

The Welfare Homelessness Services participating in the research were the welfare arms of Baptist Care (SA) Employment Services and Hanover Employment Services. Hanover Welfare Services provides a range of housing and support services to those at risk of or experiencing homelessness within Victoria; interviews took place within the Housing arm of this organisation. Interviews from Baptist Care's (SA) homelessness service were undertaken at a day centre in the Adelaide CBD.

The two Social Enterprises participating in the research—Big Issue and STREAT—provided different services to clients at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The Big Issue is an international organisation that provides employment opportunities for homeless and marginalised people, primarily through selling the Big Issue magazine. Vendors receive half of the profit from each \$5 sale. There are no formal prerequisites for vendors to start selling the Big Issue; after a short period, the vendor graduates from the trainee vendor position and can then sell the magazines they purchase at selected locations and times. There is currently no maximum period of association with The Big Issue in Australia. In contrast, STREAT is a six-month program for people aged between 16 and 25 years. It provides training and a supported pathway to long-term careers in hospitality for young jobseekers experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Young people have opportunities for future support after the six-month period, based on their personal circumstances.

Table 5 provides an overview of selected characteristics of service providers. Of the 17 participants, 10 were from South Australia and seven from Victoria. The South Australian group included two service providers located in rural areas (around 100 kilometres from Adelaide). Seven service providers worked in the not-for-profit sector, six in the for-profit sector, and four in social enterprises.

**Table 5 Summary of selected service provider characteristics (N = 17)**

| Service Type     | Sector  | Highest level of education | Age (years) | Gender | Worked in the field | Time with employer |
|------------------|---------|----------------------------|-------------|--------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Employment = 9   | NFP = 7 | Degree = 9                 | 18- 25 = 0  | F = 13 | 0-2yrs = 4          | 0-2yrs = 11        |
| Homelessness = 4 | FP = 6  | Cert IV/<br>Diploma = 6    | 25-34 = 6   | M = 4  | 2-5yrs = 5          | 2-5yrs = 2         |
| Social Ent = 4   | SE = 4  | Cert III = 1               | 35-44 = 6   |        | 5-10yrs = 3         | 5-10yrs = 3        |
|                  |         | Yr 10 = 1                  | 45+ = 5     |        | 10+yrs = 5          | 10+yrs = 1         |

Service providers were predominantly female, with only four male service providers participating in the research. They had an average age of 40, ranging from 25 to 66 years. All but one service provider had tertiary qualifications, although not always in a relevant area (for example, one person had a background as an engineer, another as a chef). The majority of service providers had worked in their field for more than two years. There was an overall average of 7 years experience, ranging from 1.5 to 28 years. Despite their experience in their field, 11 service providers had been with their current employer for less than two years, indicating a relatively high level of mobility within the service-provider workforce.

**1.5.5 Limitations of the research**

As this research was a pilot project, the sample size was small and could not be stratified beyond the distinction between service providers and jobseekers. This limited our capacity to identify and report on the nuances of specific barriers to employment. The broad purpose of the pilot was to inform a larger project on the relationship between homelessness and work.

The sample had two other limitations. First, it focused on jobseekers who were currently using employment services or who had identified as being homeless and wanting work. This enabled us to examine the ways in which services did or did not assist jobseekers to address their vocational and non-vocational barriers to finding work, but it did not allow us to draw conclusions about how services helped successful jobseekers to obtain work. Only service providers identified success stories about how clients had overcome their barriers and had found work. Successful jobseekers were not part of the sample, and accessing them as a separate group would have been difficult. To incorporate success from a jobseeker’s perspective, a longitudinal study would need to be undertaken to track jobseekers experiencing homelessness from their initial contact with service providers until they were engaged in secure, decent, employment.<sup>8</sup> Second, it became clear that ideas about job readiness were closely tied to perceptions about what employers did or did not want. Our research did not include employers, so the extent to which these perceptions were accurate could not be investigated. These issues are discussed further in the conclusion to Section 3.

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<sup>8</sup> It would be beneficial to maintain a study beyond this point, to examine the long-term impact that homelessness may have on ongoing employment and careers.

## 2 Results: Pathways into Work

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Previous research on homelessness and employment reports that jobseekers with unstable housing have conventional ideas about work and the pathways into work (Singh 2005; Horn and Jordan 2006; Perkins 2007): work is considered an important and central component of life. This was confirmed in the present study. For example, improved living standards and affordable private rental was a primary motivation for work among jobseeker participants. Some wanted a sense of comfort, and disposable income so that they could engage in travel, shopping, or social events. Others thought that employment would stave off the boredom of unemployment. Those with children wanted to provide for their families.

While their aspirations around work were conventional, the strategies needed to find pathways into work were not.

In this section, we examine the issues faced by homeless jobseekers in accessing work. Two perspectives are provided: the homeless jobseeker and the service providers who assist them through the process. For the majority of jobseekers, housing instability was only one of many barriers to work. The discussion on how homeless jobseekers find work takes account of the complexity of the barriers that jobseekers faced and the ways that they engaged with different types of service providers to address their vocational and non-vocational barriers.

### 2.1 Context Setting: Housing Instability

This study is not focussed on people's experience of homelessness itself. Rather, it examines how homelessness influences or impacts upon jobseekers' searches for work.

The homeless jobseekers in the research were diverse and had varying experiences of housing instability. Given the sample size ( $n = 32$ ), we did not attempt to further categorise participants (for example, into age groups, gender and so on). It is important, however, to recognise that individual circumstances, such as a history of homelessness, life stage, and work history do matter. For example, a young woman with a short history of housing instability and recent experience of domestic violence, but who finished Year 12 and has some family support seeking work has very different employment needs, barriers, and opportunities, than an older man with a long history of primary and secondary homelessness, substance abuse, and mental illness, and who finished school in Year 10 but holds a forklift licence or Certificate I qualification does. To provide some indication of these differences, we begin this section with three stories from homeless jobseekers.

**Sarah** is 43 years old. At the time of the interview she was staying at a friend's place, but prior to this she had been in a rooming house for over a year. She left school in Year 10 and had intermittent experience as a factory or line worker. Housing originally became unstable due to her job loss. Finding stable housing and schooling for her daughter is her first priority, and although income could improve her housing options, work is not her greatest concern. She reported having health issues and being stressed; drug addiction and rehabilitation have impacted on her work experiences. She is currently on a waiting list for public housing.

Sarah reported difficulty in dealing with consistent rejection from housing and work: *'Yeah nothing's really going anywhere at the moment. All I get is knocked back and then you get up and then you get knocked back—you know, you try to get back on your feet and you get knocked back down again. There's never any positive news, it's all negative'*. She has no

formal qualifications, although she does possess a driver's licence. She has little contact with her family and is estranged from her daughter's father. Assistance from employment and housing service providers has been inconsistent.

**Chris** is a 32 year old man who has been living in his car for several months after splitting up with his partner, with whom he has two children. His work experience includes casual labour jobs, with his longest-standing job being with a recycling plant for around 12 months. He was sacked from the recycling job during a time of personal hardship; his employer gave him information regarding counselling and he was dismissed shortly after this occurred. He has a driver's licence, and a forklift licence, but he completed no formal qualifications after leaving secondary school in Year 10.

He is currently very motivated to find work, but he has struggled with rejection and a lack of response from potential employers. He is eager to find full-time work but has not yet had any success; casual work appears to be more attractive for employers. *'I broke up with my ex-partner and two kids and things like that, so they reckon that that sort of affected my work, so they laid me off and that sort of disappointed me because I had full-time work which would have helped me either way because I would have been able to get housing, accommodation, food, clothing, and stuff like that ... it just went back down the drain, so basically I'm stuck in a hole again'*. Chris had relatively little interaction with housing service providers, but was receiving employment services through a JSA. He had a very independent view of how he was going to get ahead in life; he found his circumstances at this time shameful in comparison to others his own age.

**Christina** is 20 years old with three children, the youngest being 4 months old. The children do not live with her. She has negligible work experience since completing Year 10 in secondary school; being pregnant has interrupted any attempts to gain work. After a long history of transient housing, she currently lives in public housing and is awaiting a transfer to another property. Frustration has occurred with Families SA and with the rigorous process to regain custody of her children, which competes with time she needs to seek work. She has experienced depression and anxiety throughout this period, and is seeing a psychologist. She claims that her depression—in addition to drug and alcohol abuse—occurred due to a previous relationship and the stress of separation from her children.

These stories illustrate that jobseekers' pathways into and experiences of homelessness differ to varying degrees. Prominent definitions of homelessness, influenced by historical counts of this population, privilege individuals' current housing conditions (point-in-time definitions). Other definitions of homelessness emphasise the subjective experience of homelessness and its impact on people over time (Grace, Wilson, and Batterham 2005), beyond the period of actual housing instability. The long-term impact of homelessness, including its impact on jobseeking and job acquisition was evident among the participants in this research.

Many jobseekers in this research recalled stories of long-term precarious housing from childhood or adolescence. Personal circumstances, poor health, relationship and family breakdowns, accidents, or financial stress resulted in their housing becoming precarious and, often following that, they became unemployed. The experience of precarious housing and the complex barriers associated with it can have a lasting effect on an individual's identity and sense of self. Research on homelessness careers has recognised the development of a homeless self-identity, as people pass through phases of homelessness (Mackenzie and

Chamberlain 2003; Erebus Consulting 2004; Fopp 2009). As such, an individual's identification as homeless may continue even after housing has become stable.

The ways in which housing instability, complex disadvantage, and having a low income affected individual jobseekers differed, with varying consequences for an individual's accumulation of human and social capital. While most of the homeless jobseekers in this study were attempting to redress their personal and social circumstances by actively engaging in service provision and finding employment pathways, others found the task overwhelming. Despite their desire to work, they were not always actively engaged in the search process. For example, service providers working within the homelessness services sector could identify only a few clients who were actively jobseeking. Reasons for disengagement from jobseeking included health (especially mental health) issues, addiction and substance abuse, experience of consistent rejection, lack of competitiveness in the job market, and lack of stable housing.

Opinions differed among jobseekers about the impact of housing instability and (or) homelessness on their capacity to seek to engage in work. For example, two jobseekers argued that it had no impact:

*[I: How does staying on a couch, couch surfing, affect your ability to work?]*

*It doesn't ... You just get up in the morning, have breakfast and go. Jason, Welfare Homelessness Service, 35-44 years*

*Not really, no. Even at NACHA, at Unity Housing, it hasn't really stopped my ability and I have worked well being there. Eric, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), 35-44 years*

Most, however, indicated that housing instability impeded their ability to find work, identifying both the practical limitations that unstable housing presented when looking for work and the flow-on effects such as de-motivation, loss of hope and decreased self-esteem.

*Well at the moment...when you live in a tent and crawl out of your tent you can't really walk into a shower and have a shower and get ready and go to work. You can't go down the local barbecue just to cook your tea every night, because people might cotton onto it. Allan, Welfare Homelessness Service, 45-54 years*

*There's no point looking for a job when I don't know where I'm going to live. It all revolves around finding somewhere to live.... If I don't know where I'm living I can't say – I'd love to go back to work but until I know where I'm going to be living, I can't give you any questions or answers to that sort of thing. Sarah, Welfare Homelessness Service, 35-44 years<sup>9</sup>*

Like the majority of jobseekers, service providers also indicated that housing instability negatively impacted on jobseekers' chances of finding and staying in employment. Barriers that were consistently identified included: hygiene, transport, emotional instability, and employer attitudes. For example, the ability to present oneself appropriately is severely diminished when in precarious housing, as it is difficult to maintain the required levels of

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<sup>9</sup> It is likely that individual characteristics (including household type) and accommodation type and location influenced jobseekers' responses to this issue, however this is beyond the scope of this research.

hygiene when clients have shelter in emergency accommodation, supported housing, or are couch surfing. This view was expressed by service providers across all categories. Jobseekers rarely have the opportunity to select the location of their housing, which means that transport to job opportunities (or to their local JSA) is an additional stress. Furthermore, their inability to provide evidence of a permanent address may deter employers from pursuing opportunities with a particular jobseeker's application. Fear and insecurity are evident in this equation: housing provides a sense of stability; the lack of stability is a strong deterrent to being able to participate fully in jobseeking processes.

*It's a vicious circle isn't it? You can't get a job if you haven't got an address – although having an email address and a mobile phone is a huge advantage, but you've got to put an address down. People might write to you and say 'come along and have an appointment' and if you haven't got an address then what the hell can you do? Apart from anything else it's mentally and emotionally very unsettling not having an address. SP, Independent JSA, Female, 55+ years*

*Lack of stability with housing ... having an environment that's stable that you can return to, means that you can have, being confident enough to assert yourself in that kind of environment and the process that it takes to actually secure a job in the first place. SP, Welfare Homelessness Service, Female, 25-34 years*

These stories reveal a tension between the timing of finding housing and work: a Catch 22 situation which can leave homeless jobseekers stranded between the pressure of gaining work to be able to support decent housing, and gaining housing in order to seek work. In addition to the responses about the direct impact of housing instability on homeless jobseekers, service providers were divided on the question of whether the priority for homeless jobseekers should be housing or employment, with many indicating that an integrated approach was necessary, a theme which is explored in Section 2.2.5. The timing and configuration of housing and employment, therefore, is crucial in order for jobseekers to achieve and sustain employment, and gain security through housing.

## **2.2 How Homeless Jobseekers Find Work**

Given this background, how do homeless jobseekers go about finding pathways into work?

This study focused on two pathways into work: (a) Job Services Australia (JSA), and (b) Social Enterprises. Homeless jobseekers access JSA through a referral from Centrelink who assign the jobseeker to a stream—homeless jobseekers are typically classified into Stream Four. Once referred to a JSA, clients are assigned a case manager who works with them over a period of time to develop an employment-pathway plan which usually requires accessing employment-pathway funds.<sup>10</sup> The pathway into social enterprises is usually more ad hoc, with jobseekers accessing training and (or) employment through a not-for-profit organisation (for contextual information about JSA, see Appendix 1).

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<sup>10</sup>The classification of jobseekers into streams is highly significant within the job-search process, as it determines an individual's pathway within the service network. Initial reports of Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) processes have been positive, (for example, see Perkins 2007). Yet assessments do not necessarily capture the complexities of the barriers experienced by an individual jobseeker. The effectiveness of JCA is currently debated (see Horn 2010).

Within JSAs, homeless jobseekers receive an increased and intensified form of support through their classification as Stream Four clients. As discussed above, the multiple non-vocational barriers that homeless jobseekers experience often prevent immediate job placement; and there are additional vocational barriers such as lack of experience, training, or qualifications for future work. Consequently, service provision as reported by service providers and some clients is a complex and multi-layered process, which varied according to whether services were integrated within or across multiple providers. Service providers interviewed in this sample in all categories consistently reported that only a small percentage of their homeless jobseeker clients achieve job readiness, let alone employment, emphasising the need to understand the *process* of gaining work and engaging in employment services for this cohort of jobseekers. A significant component of this process is that of *preparing* homeless jobseekers for future participation in the labour market.

### 2.2.1 Work histories

Homeless jobseekers' history of work influenced many of their attitudes and the ways in which they engaged in the process of seeking further work. While the stories and experiences of homelessness varied, participants reported two basic categories of work experience:

- a history of relatively consistent, although sometimes intermittent, employment; and
- experience of long-term unemployment for those who did not have a background of skills to develop or to draw upon if work opportunities were presented to them.

These differences not only affected each person's human capital—that is, the objective measures of job readiness associated with age, qualifications, and experience—but also their confidence in navigating the world of work. Finding work for jobseekers without a consistent or even intermittent job history provided an additional challenge, as case managers were starting from scratch to build experience and a skill set. This challenge exists in addition to barriers which homeless jobseekers with both categories of work histories experience.

Homeless jobseekers who had experience in a particular area or industry, consistently thought that they just needed to be given a chance.<sup>11</sup> The key concerns for these jobseekers were to be able to account for gaps in their work histories and to regain their competitiveness in the labour market through additional training, or gaining (recent) work experience. This was a particular issue for men, who could be expected to have an uninterrupted work history. However, as discussed above, it is very difficult to maintain work during times of housing instability when individuals are dealing with various challenges such as relationship difficulties, health concerns, or addictions, and are unable to focus on retaining their job. Gaps appear in resumes, which potential employers may judge unfavourably, and the

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<sup>11</sup>One jobseeker thought it would reflect well on an employer to have people such as himself on staff; he thought it would be useful for employers to 'showcase' individuals such as himself who had experience in a particular industry, but who due to a variety of circumstances, found themselves without work and in precarious housing for a period of time in their lives. This view was not shared by any of the JSA service providers.

jobseeker is seen as uncompetitive within that market. Lack of referees is also seen as a barrier for employment. Jobseekers spoke of the need to deal with frequent rejection or lack of responses from job applications, notwithstanding that this is an experience common to many mainstream jobseekers too. Even though some homeless jobseekers might have had the required human capital to engage in work, they were still viewed as uncompetitive by mainstream JSA service providers who were often reluctant to present them to potential employers.

*The problem is once you're out of the system and out of the cycle it's very hard to get back into it again. When you're in there it's very easy to manoeuvre around, but when you're out of it people start to ask questions ... 'Why haven't you been working for this time?' – even though I had a concrete, stable, 22-year working history, it doesn't really count for much, only that year or a year and a bit where you're not stable people – they get a bit worried about things, you know? Mark, Welfare Homelessness Service, 35-44 years*

Jobseekers with long histories of precarious housing or complex disadvantage have little work experience to include in their resumes and, consequently, felt especially uncompetitive in the job market. These jobseekers were often uncertain about how to achieve success when work opportunities were presented, and some had trouble indicating in what work they would like to engage. Stories of rejection and retrenchment from previous employment were also common and were often reflected in low self-esteem regarding their competency and future competitiveness in the job market. One jobseeker had been asked to lie in interviews, an action that perhaps further undermined her self-esteem regarding competitiveness in the labour market.

*Maybe just some work experience, real work experience, because I couldn't put anything on my resume. There was another one [social enterprise] I joined, but I'm not going to say which one, but they told us to lie in the interview ... Julie, Social Enterprise (STREAT), 15-24 years*

When asked what had been the most useful thing that they had done in finding work, many jobseekers struggled to answer. Partly, this was because they had not found work since having housing instability; sometimes, it was because they had never been in work and so they did not know on which resources they needed to draw. Often these resources were informal, with several respondents listing networks and relationships as having been the most effective method for finding work.

*To tell you the truth, a lot of my work I've found in the pub. Yeah, the bulk of them just through mates, word of mouth usually. Patrick, Welfare Homeless Service, 25-34 years*

*Everywhere I've worked has been word of mouth basically. Where I'm currently employed my mum went to school with the guy ... I did actually apply for a job online, a station hand job which was going up in the remote mid-north of South Australia, but that ended up being taken by somebody else anyway ... I have done that and I know how to do it, but the jobs that I have been in have all been word of mouth. Damian, Independent JSA, 15-24 years*

However, a period of housing instability often results in the deterioration of established (and perhaps more useful) networks and relationships. These may be replaced with networks and relationships that help people to navigate and survive their immediate circumstances, but which are unlikely to result in the kinds of contacts that might lead to decent work opportunities. The shift in social resources away from the ones which would help in gaining (and sustaining) work featured in many of the homeless jobseekers' narratives.

For other jobseekers, and for most of the JSA providers, training was viewed as a useful avenue into work. Providers within STREAT also highlighted training as an important avenue, as it was an essential component of the social-enterprise process. Big Issue service providers had less of a focus on specific training pathways due to the nature of the employment offered. Although over 70 per cent of jobseeker participants had some form of post-secondary qualifications or training, many expressed wariness about engaging in skill-development programs unless there were jobs available in the area. Those who were most enthusiastic about training were jobseekers who had received work experience while training and had been linked to potential employers. This assisted them not only with skills, but also with the social resources required to find work. An example of the successful combination of training and employment opportunities is provided by a STREAT jobseeker:

*I was like 'look, is there any help I can get with doing a Cert III?' [And they said] 'oh this program that's just come out, you get a Cert II which is one under but it's all free, it goes for six months, you get paid, you get heaps of support—at the time I wasn't living at home—and it was like perfect ... They had said from the start like for a few months after STREAT they would help us all get into employment ... They were just like "my friend's opened up a—a guy I used to work with has opened up a new restaurant in [Melbourne CBD] and would you be interested in that or whatever?" And then we just walked down one day after work at the carts while I was still in STREAT and said "look, I'm finishing this program in a couple of weeks" and he took me on ... we pretty much all got jobs through STREAT.' Ellie, Social Enterprise (STREAT), 18-24 years*

Other jobseekers were more cynical about the usefulness of training as a means of finding work, as illustrated by Scott:

*Well just recently I finished a, well the fancy term ... [is an] asset-maintenance course, but for people like myself and regular people... a cleaning course ... it was a Certificate II in Asset Maintenance, and the way I look at it is well it's something to whack on my resume so to show future interviewers that I have been doing something instead of just bumming around doing nothing and like drinking and smoking and what not, you know? Scott, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), 25-34 years*

Training was not necessarily a guarantee for future work opportunities. In addition to training pathways, both jobseekers and service providers acknowledged the usefulness of the small things that JSA service providers did for them such as providing mobile phones, assisting with licensing, or transport support. These types of strategies were funded through the employment-pathways funds or through accessing resources from other services.

### **2.2.2 Job readiness**

Service providers' perceptions of the job readiness of homeless jobseekers influence the types of services that a jobseeker will receive and, as a result, the experience for homeless jobseekers in their search for work. The first indicator of the lack of job readiness occurs at the point of referral, when homeless jobseekers are placed in Stream Four following a Job Capacity Assessment. In understanding the notion of job readiness, some of the expectations and assumptions of engagement in the workforce are revealed. This includes the expectations of the service providers, but also of the jobseeker themselves. Both are explored in the following section.

Typically, a jobseeker is deemed to be job ready when the barriers to work have been addressed. The following quotes give an indication of what a monumental task this can be

when working with people who have complex disadvantage, low levels of human and social capital, and unstable housing.

*Ultimately it's very unlikely to place somebody into a job that they're likely to stay in if they haven't addressed those non-vocational issues, so it's a bit of a slow process, which is a chicken and egg thing because if they had employment it would solve the housing issues more quickly. I mean we can do things, practical things, like have them ready with work clothes, interview clothes, things like that. We also do job-search skills-training activities that help them to become job ready, but again, it's something that's down the track. SP, Welfare JSA, Female, 25-34 years*

*Any client who is currently homeless, living in their car, still sleeping rough, we just can't help them with work. We need a stable address on their resume. They need to be contactable; they need to have certain things in their life stable before we could move them to employment. Those clients who are not job ready, they're the ones that I work with for drug and alcohol detox, that kind of thing and to find out where they're at with that. We just can't look for work for them, they're just not ready. They're just not emotionally and mentally ready to take on part-time or full-time work. SP, Welfare JSA, Female, 35-44 years*

*Job readiness is anybody who has the will to work, has the ability to work, is skilled, and is available. You might still be technically homeless, but if you're temporarily staying in a caravan park and you are ready to work ... then you would be deemed job ready. If you've got the skills, are willing and able to maintain that employment with some intervention and support, that would be job ready. SP, Welfare JSA, Female, 25-34 years*

Although the above examples are all from JSA service providers, other service providers also articulated a range of understandings regarding job readiness. These ideas culminate in an ideal type of jobseeker who would be viewed as presentable to a potential employer. To achieve this ideal, jobseekers would need vocational skills and have positive non-vocational attributes such as sound health, housing, attitude, availability, behaviour, and the desire to work. Although skill shortages exist in various industries, service providers would not risk their relationship with employers through attempting to place their homeless jobseekers until the jobseeker could meet the criteria of this ideal jobseeker. This means that the pathway to becoming job ready is often long, involves many meetings, incremental stages of progress, and a variety of strategies. The need for consistent meetings over an unspecified period of time, however, can itself be a barrier to job readiness for people who may regularly change locations, have problems with transport, and have to juggle all of this with meeting their various other needs such as housing and health.

In contrast to the service providers' perceptions of job readiness, homeless jobseekers often feel job ready if they have done some training (or have prior experience), have made themselves presentable, and were actively applying for work. Many discussed their involvement in volunteering, studying, gaining licences, or attending counselling as a means of becoming job ready. Others had taken jobs in social enterprises to gain job experience, skills, and training (the role of social enterprises is discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.4). The difficulty for service providers, especially those in JSAs, is that these strategies were a necessary but not a sufficient step towards becoming job ready.

The challenge for service providers is to keep homeless jobseekers engaged long enough to redress the non-vocational barriers that need to be overcome in order to be job ready. Non-vocational barriers included child-care or child-protection issues, a history of domestic violence, coming from an Indigenous background, having a physical or mental illness, or

having histories of substance abuse or addiction. For some jobseekers, job readiness may never happen; their levels of impairment and the complexity of their needs make it unlikely that they will ever work in the mainstream labour market. Sometimes, these jobseekers move into substitute work in social enterprises (for example, Big Issue), or they are placed in volunteer organisations. With the majority of homeless jobseekers, however, service providers must manage the individual's unrealistic expectations of their job readiness while keeping them engaged, working through the range of vocational and non-vocational barriers.

Working towards job readiness may also bring into question notions of success and what the goals of service provision are to homeless jobseekers, for example, the assumption that success is consistent mainstream employment. Although this may well be what a jobseeker wants, and perhaps needs in order to provide some form of stability and security, according to the service providers it is very rare and only occurs after a period of being in casual or precarious work.

The tension between addressing the barriers and achieving job readiness highlight again the enormity of the task for jobseekers, as well as service providers, in this context. Indeed, service providers spoke of the need to manage unrealistic expectations and hold in tension what jobseekers needed (that is, to become job ready) against what they wanted (that is, work). Of particular concern was avoiding setting up jobseekers to fail. The aim was not simply to get work for homeless jobseekers, but to make sure that it could be maintained. This view was expressed from both homelessness and JSA service providers.

*People have often got some really... great goals but they're more long-term, so often you have to break that down a bit... talk to them about maybe how they're going to get there, and maybe from that conversation ... there might be a few other tasks to take place or things to do before employment is a realistic option ... You also don't want someone to start employment before they're ready and then it not work out, it can be a further ... unstabiliser [sic] I guess. So I guess it's working with clients to see if they are ready for it and how they can go about it, breaking it down to make it realistic. SP, Welfare Homelessness Service, Female, 25-34 years*

*[A homeless jobseeker] has momentary insights into the fact that maybe things are around the wrong way so it may be ... better to deal with drug and alcohol and housing first to achieve some degree of stability, and then look at training or employment, because then it's more sustainable. What often happens with these particular clients who are frustrated and want to work ... because they won't deal with the outstanding issues, they tend to set themselves up to fail in a job. They might sustain it for a week or a month or ... even longer, but there's a sense that eventually it won't work out long term and that becomes, I guess, a self-fulfilling cycle and possibly they will lose the job and then feel bad about themselves ... it's often a problem in terms of trying to reframe things and get them to try dealing with more urgent issues first. SP, Welfare Homelessness Service, Male, 35-44 years*

*We have a number of clients who we've worked with for a long time and we kind of get to the point where we think 'oh, they're just never going to get a job' and we put our own barriers up before we even offer positions to them. We were talking yesterday that we really just need to refer anyone who is on our books. If they're not deemed by a doctor to be totally unfit for employment there must be something that they can do, no matter how small it can be ... I don't know whether that's us putting the barriers up first and sort of thinking 'well, look, you probably should deal with this first' and once again that's the different interpretation of being job ready. When people come to us sometimes 'I just need a job; I just need a job, that'll solve all my problems if I just have a job' and, yeah, it might but we have—we've so many people that get*

*jobs come back and it's like 'well okay, why is this happening all the time?' SP, Independent JSA, Female, 35-44 years*

Each homeless jobseeker presents a service provider with a unique set of issues that need to be addressed before the jobseeker can be seen as job ready. There is, however, no clear definition of job readiness. This means that the end point is difficult to articulate to jobseekers. Consequently, it appears that there is a risk that job readiness becomes a process (rather than a goal) in which jobseekers are caught up in the continual tasks of becoming job ready. This is likely to be frustrating for them, as often they conceive of work as an achievable and immediate goal. In addition, with notions of the ideal jobseeker being independent and free from barriers that might inhibit their potential employment, the process of becoming job ready for many homeless jobseekers is likely to be long and may involve many different service providers. Even when there is goodwill and commitment from both jobseekers and service providers, the likelihood of homeless jobseekers achieving job readiness is low. While service providers could always point to a success story, these were acknowledged as being few and far between.

### **2.2.3 Use of employment services: JSA**

Jobseekers and service providers from five JSA agencies participated in this research: Baptist Care SA Employment Services, Finding Workable Solutions, Job Maxima, Workskil, and Hanover Welfare Employment Services. Centrelink first assesses jobseekers' barriers to work through a Job Capacity Assessment, and this information influences the pathways to employment. After the needs of a jobseeker have been identified, JSA service providers assist jobseekers to address specific non-vocational and vocational barriers to employment, with the end goal being placement in work.

On the one hand, a challenge for service providers is that jobseekers do not always disclose their homeless status to Centrelink assessors in the first instance, or to JSA case managers. Many service providers noted that jobseekers are reluctant to disclose their homelessness status in early interviews for fear of embarrassment, stigma, discrimination, or other material consequences (such as losing rent-assistance payments). However, by withholding this information, homeless jobseekers risk missing out on Stream Four services for which they are eligible. Avoiding disclosure of information about housing, health, and personal circumstances is therefore a significant issue that influences the service relationship and employment outcomes for the jobseeker.

Depending on their previous experience in using JSAs or in finding work, homeless jobseekers varied in the ways in which they engaged with JSA service providers: from minimal interaction to intensive assistance. From discussions with homeless jobseekers and JSA service providers, three aspects of service provision were highlighted: consistency, independence, and location.

**Consistency** was an issue for jobseekers and service providers. Some jobseekers became frustrated when appointments were short or intermittent, or when the service provider had little knowledge about either the jobseekers' aspirations for work, the complexity of the barriers, or the life context within which work was being sought. Jobseekers also expressed frustration with the limited choice of training available, and the lack of choice in jobs for which they were applying. On the other hand, service providers discussed their struggle to engage consistently with jobseekers where contact was sporadic and inconsistent due to their failure

to attend appointments. Some homeless jobseekers were perceived to abuse the system, reportedly skipping from provider to provider, rather than building a productive relationship that might achieve employment outcomes.

Where consistent and intensive services were provided to homeless jobseekers, these were highly valued. However, jobseekers saw this as being due to the helpfulness of particular individuals, rather than to a consistent service approach. These individual service providers were seen to be willing to give jobseekers the assistance they required at the particular time of need: their situation had been fairly and accurately assessed, referrals had been sought and followed through, and the person was available to meet with them on a regular basis.

*I'm paying for some of the licences and they're [JSA] paying for some of them ... the fact that they're not lazy is a big point, that they actually keep in contact and check how you're going. That they don't use "you're an adult, deal with it yourself" as an excuse. They help with funding and they're just there to talk to if you need anything. Jennifer, Independent JSA, 15-24 years*

**Independence** was viewed as a desirable characteristic by many homeless jobseekers. None of the jobseekers interviewed expressed an expectation of having a right to work, or that a job would just be handed to them. The self-reliance of homeless jobseekers regarding their independent capacity to find work may reflect their internalisation of individualised notions of success that have become part of the discourse surrounding employment and training. However, their self-reliance could also be a reflection of low self-esteem or self-worth about their capacity to access employment, their shame in asking for assistance, or a tendency to blame themselves for their circumstances.

When assistance was requested, it was often regarding information about the right or the most feasible pathway to job readiness. However, many homeless jobseekers did not have high expectations that service providers could or would help them to find work. Their more independent approach utilised service provision only inasmuch as they needed a bit of assistance or encouragement. Job search activities, in particular, were invariably seen as independent activities: a service provider would suggest various opportunities to the jobseeker, who would then pursue it; or a jobseeker would come into the job service and apply for jobs themselves via the Internet. The following quote from a jobseeker reflects this sense of self-reliance, occurring partly due to self-belief, but also perhaps through previous experiences of rejection, or lack of constructive assistance in the jobseeking process.

*No-one's led me, not even my own mother, I've done it all myself. My mum never did anything for me in my life ... I sort of struggle on the inside ... I just push it away, but I think that's what's making me angry, because I do it all myself. I actually haven't been told 'this is the right way to do it, this is the path you should take and this is where you should be going' ... So I sort of give up pretty easy, but I don't. I sort of wake up the next day and, you know, if I get shut down today well then fine, I'll just keep it for the day and I'll come back tomorrow. Chris, Independent JSA, 25-34 years*

The **location** of service provision affected service pathways in a number of ways. It not only affected access to the JSA, it also had an impact on the consistency and relevance of service provision and possible employment outcomes. The practical issue of distance and transport was a recurring theme in the interviews. This sometimes became even more difficult if the housing found for a jobseeker was outside their current service provider's jurisdiction. This required jobseekers to change JSA, disrupting established relationships with service providers, which were viewed as important for achieving continuity of service. It was

often difficult to find employment opportunities that were convenient (or within a public transport route) to jobseekers' housing, posing significant challenges to a cohort that often did not have a driving licence, let alone the ability to afford a car.

*The other barrier for them in the way the system is constructed is that services are by region, so if you are a client ... and if I can find you housing but it's actually just across the boundary [of case management] ... that's great, but you're now no longer my client, you will be referred to another provider, so you start all over again and building that relationship when people are already very vulnerable ... As a case manager, you've got to build confidence with people and one of the best methods of placement if a person's got anxiety or depression is actually more rapid placements with lots of support, so it's not about waiting to become work ready, it's reasoning and understanding the [context of their situation]. ... Given the housing situation in Adelaide that's very unlikely, to find a person a house that is—[within your jurisdiction]. When you look at refugee groups, often when they first arrive they're settled in a community and they're close to the inner city, because that's where the housing stock is, but it's just a temporary housing stock, so then once they have moved beyond that ... they've got no support networks, it's much harder to find a job, no child care, no volunteer support, so it's about where the housing stock is and the structural things that cause barriers. There are structural barriers that actually prohibit or give people a lack of support in finding employment. They've either got a house in a new region or they've lost all their support networks by the nature of the contract that services them. SP, Welfare Homelessness Service, Female, 35-44 years*

Another issue with location was related to working with Indigenous jobseekers, particularly when the location of a JSA held no specific significance to the people within the area. The lack of cultural or social ties with the land or area made it difficult for service providers to engage increasing numbers of Indigenous jobseekers. A welfare JSA provider commented:

*Obviously they're a very transient population and they have no real cultural ties to [this] area, so it's very hard to get anyone to stay here. In this area specifically the cultural ties are Salisbury and then Port Augusta, they just pass through [this] area and we're wishing them to stay here. Why not work with them and support them ... transition them to where they're going in their normal transition routes, rather than forcing them to look into an area when they don't want to be. SP, Welfare JSA, Female, 25-34 years*

Homeless jobseekers who utilise JSA receive additional care and support compared to Stream One or Stream Two clients. Service providers in this study were generally aware of the multiple and layered barriers that homeless jobseekers face in finding work, and could address some of these through the development of networks of referral systems, or through directly meeting some needs themselves. Many of the jobseekers recalled the usefulness of a service that they had engaged in, yet this took place in particular contexts. First, assistance from JSA often focused on the non-vocational aspects of assistance, while the jobseeker engaged in job-search strategies by themselves. Second, if the jobseeker did find their service provider to be particularly useful, this was mostly an individual who provided consistent and thorough care, rather than being seen as reflecting a service approach by JSA. The importance of relationship building and continuity of service provision has been highlighted in this section. However, high levels of relational and complex care are demanding on service providers' time and resources, and these are finite in the organisational context. Broadly, the challenges identified in using JSAs indicate the presence of tensions between the situational experience of homeless jobseekers, the contractual restrictions within the service provision system, and the need to be flexible to meet jobseekers' complex needs. These tensions are discussed in more detail in Section 2.3.

## 2.2.4 Use of employment services: social enterprises

Two social enterprises participated in this study: The Big Issue and STREAT. The Big Issue provides homeless jobseekers with work through becoming a vendor for the magazine. STREAT provides training and a supported pathway to long-term careers in hospitality for young jobseekers experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These opportunities to work within larger supportive structures was said to bring a sense of confidence to the homeless jobseekers who had not previously been able to engage with the mainstream labour market.

*It was the best support I've ever had ... they're all so supportive and understanding and loving and welcoming. I don't think any of us have really had that before, so even just to get that means like so much ... they gave me a new way of thinking about things. I even went through a detox program while I was at STREAT. They were really cool, they came and visited me a few times, were really supportive ... The detox was the best thing, and having them support me was awesome ... after the course they're still there, they still ring you all the time, they still send you letters, write on my Facebook. They're still supporting ... [They have said] 'Come in next year and we'll help you fix up your resume for this cruise ship', so to have that is amazing ... You know, like so much experience that I never would have had, ever. Beth, Social Enterprise (STREAT), 15-24 years*

*Well, before I started doing the Big Issue I had no experience in being able to save money or even handle money ... but doing this, it's given me great customer-service skills and I actually learnt a bit of my maths by using money and actually learning to save for a change. Matt, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), 15-24 years*

These types of enterprises allow homeless jobseekers to re-engage with the wider community in ways that are valued, that is by earning an income. This contrasts with their usual interactions in which they are more likely to be stigmatised, avoided, treated paternalistically, or seen as a welfare problem. The invisible benefits of being part of a social enterprise were therefore important:

*We produce a magazine and the only motivation behind ... the magazine [is] something that is as widely interesting to as wide a range of people, so that people can sell it to earn an income. In addition to the income, there's also the whole social—the rubbing shoulders with the wider community which some people might call social inclusion or tackling social exclusion. I guess it's a whole lot of things that happen that are—most things that happen are invisible and the thing that is visible is there's an exchange between a magazine and \$5. SP, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), Male, 35-44 years*

Through engaging in social enterprises, homeless jobseekers took a different pathway into work. For some, this was a transitional strategy through which they passed while learning the skills and gaining the confidence to move into mainstream work. For others, it was an end point: this was the only form of work they were likely to sustain.

*It is transitional for some people and for some it is a pretty good fit with what their skill set—whether or not it's intellectual disability or that coupled with physical disability, and then—or some sort of chronic mental health issue ... and that mixed in ... the responsibility the vendors have is just to book a spot ahead, to confirm the spot on the morning of them working. If we don't hear from them, that's fine. Some people do say 'actually I'm not going to work today' but we just assume that they're not working and that's cool, work when you want to work The flexibility of the work suits different peoples' physical abilities but also mental abilities. For some*

*people, it's a stepping stone and for others it's an end point. SP, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), Male, 35-44 years*

There is, then, a different concept of success aspired to other than that of the JSAs. Service providers in social enterprises recognise that a significant proportion of homeless jobseekers may never be able to participate in mainstream jobs. What they offer for this group of jobseekers is a sense of doing something meaningful and productive (although it was also recognised that some people in unstable housing could not even reach this level of achievement).

*Even people who might actively try to find other work, like [name] knows his limitations and ... went back to the factory thing and couldn't handle it, but ... I don't know that there's anything that [he] could do to make himself more ready; it's just that's just him ... Like it's not like he's not trying, he desperately wants a job, but for some of them, I think they would acknowledge that that may never happen, it may not be possible. SP, Social Enterprise Service (Big Issue), Male, 35-44 years*

Service providers in social enterprises reframe work and job readiness around jobseeker capacities and capabilities, providing them with the support they need to achieve what they can. Within STREAT, homeless jobseekers were provided with integrated services redressing personal, housing, and employment issues, but always within the context that the in-house training and work experience would lead to real opportunities in the mainstream work force.

*I guess what we're trying to do here is provide enough flexibility and enough support so that it is a transition. It would be crazy to think that a young person who dropped out of school at Year 9 would be able to step into a full-time job without any support. SP, Social Enterprise (STREAT), Female, 45-54 years*

The structure of social enterprises seemed to allow flexibility in addressing the needs of homeless jobseekers in ways that remove the welfare orientation of what is being achieved. Their model of working was quite different to that of JSAs or homeless welfare services, which appear to be more constrained by their model of service provision and policy expectations:

*It's not about just helping them [long-term unemployed] to overcome their barriers ... it might be more about understanding the way in which we construct work, thinking about different models of what could be meaningful work ... We've got a wonderful two-speed economy but some of those people would be locked out of that, they just don't ever quite get out of their current circumstances into that competitive playing field of employment ... There's probably a transitional work model that fits for some people. For example, we've had a painting team, just a guy with an absolute passion for people who would struggle to find work for refugees who can't speak the English language, and knowing their histories, they've got no referees ... they're struggling with housing, multiple things that would be barriers to getting a job, so we form a team so they work as part of a team ... they're learning the trade. They've got some volunteers working alongside them that can spend longer teaching them how to do what they need to do to paint ... They're getting paid, so it's not like a 'work for the dole' thing, they're getting paid, but at the end of the process they've improved their English, they've got an idea of what's a team, they've got some support, and they've got some ability to have some referees. They've got a track record now of doing something and some skills, but they are getting paid properly ... a real wage! [This is what] we need to look at, models that actually allow people to enter supported employment with real wages ... People who are in very tenuous housing can get real wages so*

*that they've got a chance of getting out of their housing circumstance, and having referees. Otherwise you'll have this category of people, long-term unemployed, who can never move because the structures just don't allow them to move. Restructure what constitutes work experience so that it's paid, so instead of work experience it's actually paid at a proper salary. Reinvest in social enterprise in a different way. SP, Welfare Homelessness Service, Female, 35-44 years*

Social enterprises are more than just employment services. They offer a range of other services that help to cut through the tension between finding work and finding housing. The Big Issue, for example, offers informal support services that help to anchor jobseekers and create a base from which to develop more stability in their lives.

*I think there's an anchoring process that happens just through ongoing relationships that are like on that level ... One vendor is in ... one of the affordable living places in town and he said when he moved in it was with, I don't know, half a dozen shopping trolleys worth of stuff and he said when he moves out he'll need a truck. He really does put all the money he makes into improving his clothes and his life basically. SP, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), Male, 35-44 years*

In addition to employment and training, STREAT offers housing and personal support services. The integration of services was viewed as having positive benefits for people dealing with multiple barriers to employment (see also the next section). Within STREAT, service providers have the capacity to redress the difficulties of finding work when work histories are intermittent or non-existent, while also dealing with finding suitable housing.

*Out of the first group there were at least six who fell out of their accommodation between two and four times in the six months that they were here; two of the others, they stayed with their family but they weren't ideal situations, but at least they could maintain that. In the end—we resolved the accommodation issues, by getting shared accommodation, mainly because they were able to—give them work references and stuff and saying look, this is where they work. Also, that's pretty tentative and it's also tentative for us to do that ... so the future is still fairly insecure for them as well. SP, Social Enterprise (STREAT), Female, 45-54 years*

## **2.2.5 Use of employment services: integrated services**

In preparing homeless jobseekers for employment, service providers seek to address both vocational and non-vocational barriers. There were primarily two approaches to achieving the breadth of service provision required for homeless jobseekers. The avenue taken by most independent JSAs was to develop referral networks to services outside the JSA. These networks and relationships were rarely structured at the organisational level, thus the level of integration was significantly driven by particular individuals working in the area.

*We need to be part of something bigger, because you need not only to have access to resources but you need to ... be able to create resources and to use them to create the best ones. SP, Independent JSA Female, 45-54 years*

All JSA service providers working with Stream Four jobseekers used these types of networks, but there was a view that they were limited in achieving positive outcomes for homeless jobseekers. This was partly because it required a series of introductions to new service providers, in a different (not always accessible or convenient) location, with outcomes that might mean breaking the relationship and continuity of service between the employment service provider and the homeless jobseeker. It was also, however, partly because other

services were often stretched to the limit and could not offer the appropriate service at the appropriate times.

*I think [our JSA] is doing probably over and above what we should be in regard to homelessness ... from [our] perspective I think we're doing everything, and I think the lack of resources down here as far as accommodation goes would be probably our biggest issue down here ... There's a couple of church-based organisations that help people as they can, but no, there's nowhere to send them to bed tonight. SP, Independent JSA, Female, 25-34 years*

In contrast, STREAT and the two JSAs located within a homeless–welfare organisation (Hanover and Baptist Care) provided an internally integrated service approach. These integrated services assist homeless jobseekers with issues such as health, housing, training, counselling, skill development, and employment services. The advantage of this approach is that homeless jobseekers can access the services that they need, simultaneously, in one location, thereby increasing the likelihood of adherence to appointments or service-provider requirements.

*In this particular case he [client] was not the sole carer of his children; his children lived with their mother who was interstate. She got herself into trouble with the law, so the kids got shipped over to him. He suddenly found himself where he was staying ... wasn't secure for the kids so he moved the kids out, like sleeping in the back of the car for about three weeks. During this period [his employment consultant] noticed that it was the school-holiday period and he'd come in every day with the kids and ... addressed it with him. The kids [were now] under his care, so she rang Centrelink and made arrangements for him to become a parent/guardian of the children which gave him more funding, more access to different services. She then linked in with our local council and Work Care services who also gave him emergency housing, food packages, crisis care, a whole range of services. His main goal was to get work and to find schooling for the kids, so we sent them off to another youth-care program which handled the kids and got them sorted out, while he was freed up then to go for job interviews. It's a team effort ... Then our reverse marketers got involved and, you know with all of that teamwork involved, and the EC [Employment Consultant] backing him up the whole way, we managed to support him with some intervention to get him to where he needed to go, but without that support of those other services, we wouldn't have been able to work it. SP, Welfare JSA, Female, 25-34 years*

In addition to addressing the vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment for homeless jobseekers, the integration of services also aimed to link jobseekers back into the community to help them to develop their own resources and relationships: their social capital. The development of social capital was viewed as a means of breaking down the isolation of people who have been socially excluded, and building support networks within their communities. The ability to access social capital provides a buffer against the consequences of complex disadvantage, including unemployment, precarious housing, and social exclusion.

Despite providing integrated services, there was still some evidence of a silo mentality, which refers to differences in perspectives and priorities between homeless and employment services. In particular, it was about whether the focus for homeless jobseekers should be on accessing housing or on employment. The order in which these were addressed was important, because one shapes the other: a jobseeker might find a job in an area where there are no housing opportunities, and where access is difficult, and vice versa.

From the perspective of homeless jobseekers, the goal was usually some form of security—whether in housing or income security. Sometimes, finding security in one area offset their

motivation for security in the other. For example, some service providers suggested that homeless jobseekers became less motivated in seeking work if they found housing. In contrast, homeless jobseekers discussed their aspirations to be in private rental (which they viewed as more secure than the public or temporary options), for which they required employment and a sustainable income to meet the costs. The cycle of housing versus work was obviously difficult to penetrate when faced with both needs simultaneously. Integrated services went some way towards avoiding a Catch-22 situation; however, it was evident that the different objectives of various services affected outcomes for homeless jobseekers.

*There needs to be integration between not only the services or the type of case management that gets done within the homelessness service system, but also the connection between the job services providers as well, and an understanding between what each does and how each fits in. SP, Social Enterprise (STREAT), Female, 45-54 years*

## **2.3 Providing Services for Homeless Jobseekers**

While the sample of service-provider organisations within this study was small, it became apparent from discussions that the context within which services existed created both barriers and opportunities to finding work for homeless jobseekers. Three key aspects of service provision were highlighted in the interviews: the policy context, the organisational culture, and relationships with employers.

### **2.3.1 Policy context**

The purpose of this section is not to develop a comprehensive overview of the policy context within which employment services for homeless jobseekers are provided. Rather, the purpose is to identify those aspects that the service providers and jobseekers in this study thought were relevant to achieving positive employment outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

JSA providers for homeless jobseekers operate within a contractual system in which an organisation tenders for and wins a contract to deliver a certain number of employment outcomes within a specified time period. Some service providers indicated that it was difficult to fill their quotas for jobseekers in Stream Four, either because they did not get referrals into that particular JSA, or they did not disclose their homelessness status to service providers. Difficulties were also discussed with regard to case-load management, with there being a perception that insufficient time was available to address the complex disadvantage associated with being both homeless and a jobseeker.

*[My role] is to engage with my clients and then get a background or a history on where they've worked, have they worked and, if not, where to from here to try and build a good work history for them. Probably place them into short courses to get an idea of their interests and passions. Then look at a resume if they've got one, start with that and then we would work around whether they need any on-site counselling ... We'll assist them with resume cover-letter writing, what type of industry they've worked in, where they want to go from here, and short courses to up-skill ... The caseload fluctuates between 120 to 140 ... The requirement through DEWR for Stream Four cases is once a month, but some of the clients are quite happy to come in once a fortnight, once a week, so it's entirely up to them and they can change that agreement at any*

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<sup>12</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of the impact of how the compliance-centred regime of JSA (and prior to this, Job Networks) affects the capacity to achieve positive outcomes for Stream Four jobseekers, see Fowkes 2011; Bowman and Lawlor 2010; and O'Sullivan et al. 2009.

*time, as long as we touch base with them at least once a month. [I: It's quite a high caseload to be managing all those people] Yes. SP, Welfare JSA, Female, 25-34 years*

As part of the research, participants were asked what they thought could be done to improve outcomes for homeless jobseekers. Service providers made the following suggestions:

- Better integration of services for homeless jobseekers, including improved referral pathways
- Additional services in rural areas
- Increased service provision that specifically deals with a jobseeker's mental health problems and (or) disabilities.

The fragmentation of service provision for homeless jobseekers was the issue raised most frequently as having a detrimental impact on employment outcomes. They recognised the limited efficiency of working in isolation from other services, with this impacting on their sense of achievement.

Homeless jobseekers primarily addressed the question of what can be done by suggesting that services focus on redressing their housing instability. Interestingly, however, discussions around this differed between being provided with shelter or temporary housing, and being able to have a home. One of the goals cited by the majority of jobseekers in the study was to be in private rental which, they perceived, would provide them with a more secure and stable housing situation.

*[I: What would you like your life to be like in the next two years?]*

*Mark: Stable work with balance to do the things I want—and have my own, private accommodation instead of shared space. Mark, Welfare Homelessness Service, 35-44 years*

Some of the jobseekers also indicated home ownership as a desirable target, as the following respondents shared:

*I'd like to be in a full-time job and not a casual hourly rate. In two years' time quite honestly I'd hope that I'd nearly be ready to be buying a house, if I hadn't already. Well in two years, I'd like to be nearly saved up a deposit for a house but, yeah, I'd certainly like to be in a full-time job for sure and not just working casually ... Damian, Independent JSA, 18-24 years*

*If I get a decent paying job and had enough money behind me, then maybe I'd be able to put a deposit on a house or something. Scott, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), 25-34 years*

Achieving this goal requires a certain level of income as well as income stability. Finding work, therefore, becomes synonymous with establishing a home. In focusing on housing, homeless jobseekers did not appear to be sidelining the importance of employment. As indicated earlier, finding work was viewed as something that *they* did, rather than seeing it as an outcome that was co-produced with service providers. This could be part of the reason why employment-service providers have difficulties engaging homeless jobseekers over the period of time required to achieve a transition into work.

Policies regarding cohorts of jobseekers that are seen as high risk are caught in the tension of wanting individuals to become independent and avoid cycles of welfare dependence, but requiring a certain amount of interdependence with service providers if sound outcomes are

to be achieved. Independence, whether for jobseekers or service providers, did not appear to be a viable pathway to successful employment outcomes for homeless jobseekers.

### 2.3.2 Culture of service provision

The policy context mediates the organisational culture within which service provision takes place, in particular the relationship between time and commercial viability.

This was particularly evident in the stories of successes and challenges regarding finding work for homeless jobseekers. Despite their best efforts, service providers often struggled to find success stories among their homeless clients. When they did, there were three common themes: intensive support, advocacy, and continuity of engagement:

*We've had one of my indigenous clients ... He used to be an employment consultant himself in remote areas ... and has had some turbulent times happen in his life recently, and has left the remote area. He's come down here: he's staying in temporary accommodation. He didn't want work, didn't want to do any of those things, admittedly he had major substance abuse issues. He and I worked on those issues together and I put forward to him about engaging with client services and us actually making appointments [through a Health Clinic] for drug and alcohol issues. He felt at that stage that his appointments with me were helping him enough to be able to do that. With someone in that situation, you know they're not 100 per cent job ready and in a perfect world you want everybody to be 100 per cent job ready before you put them out there ... The majority of those Indigenous clients we feel transfer from job agency to job agency. When it starts getting a bit tough at one they go 'had enough' and they'll transfer to someone else and start all over again. This guy, after quite a few months of working with him ... he got himself an interview ... and has now actually been put on the shortlist and is waiting to hear about the job ... This is a guy that's come from working in a really top notch job to losing his way to really getting to the stage where—and he told me he was contemplating suicide ... Being able to use the skills that I do have in a positive way has ended up coming out to a great outcome for that client. He's now back into the workforce and is job ready and wants to rock on and start doing things within the system ... SP, Independent JSA, Male, 35-44 years*

*Look, I can't reiterate enough that people just—departments, just need to make this as simple as possible or, at the very least, allow workers to advocate for kids, that's another battle too; it's difficult for them. SP, Social Enterprise (STREAT), Female, 35-44 years*

These are labour-intensive, time-consuming activities that, if made available to all homeless jobseekers, would limit the numbers that service providers could work with and would mean that quotas or targets would not be met. The danger, then, is that service providers work intensively with a selected few jobseekers and minimise contact with others; or they work at a less than optimal level with all homeless jobseekers.

The streaming of jobseekers also meant that different types of skills were associated with working with particular cohorts of jobseekers. Service providers for Stream Four jobseekers were more likely to have a background or training in working with disadvantaged groups, although this was not guaranteed.

*I'm a general mainstream employment consultant who has had people on my caseload who I actually get into work. My main focus is to take people and to get them into work. I'm also aware that the system will persist in—the DEEWR system is set up so that there was a time-frame reward for getting people into work quickly; now, I didn't set that system up, that's the system that I work with, so I observe that system and I attempt to get people into work quickly because*

*that's the way the system has been set up for me to operate in. SP, Independent JSA, Male, 55+ years*

One of the key differences between service providers was the variety in their training and education. Qualifications ranged from engineering, design, anthropology, hospitality, social work, and management and this had implications for the ways in which they worked with homeless jobseekers.

*It's not formal, but because for a lot of them we are the only people that they see regularly—and I'm not a social worker ... and [my colleague] is not a social worker—I have a media degree, like I'm not skilled or trained in this area at all, but we do what we can ... SP, Social Enterprise (Big Issue), Female, 35-44 years*

While this variety in service-provider backgrounds might be advantageous at some level for addressing the barriers facing homeless jobseekers, it is likely to create inconsistencies in approaches, a reliance on formulaic or experiential approaches rather than theoretically informed practices, a lack of confidence in knowing how to be most effective, and a lack of networks in required areas.

Providing an intensive level of service to all homeless jobseekers was viewed as inefficient from a business perspective. Ensuring that services were commercially viable was one of the biggest challenges in addressing the needs of homeless jobseekers. Although employment services had a welfare function, they operated within a culture that emphasised fiscal accountability and risk minimisation. In essence, JSAs, social enterprises, and homeless welfare services all need to comply with a range of budgetary and regulatory requirements.

*We use the employment-pathway fund to access funding for those people. It's also a commercial decision on an employment consultant's part. If I spend taxpayers' money on this will it then lead to an outcome that that person gets into the workforce, pays tax, etc? So there's those commercial considerations to think of, but when you're then confronted with a person who is either homeless, about to be, or has just been homeless, there's non-vocational barriers that are impacting upon the performance of myself and all the employment consultants around the country. SP, Independent JSA, Male, 55+ years*

Service providers therefore juggle their responsibilities in finding work for homeless jobseekers with the demands placed on them by policy and contractual requirements and their organisation's reputation with employers.

### **2.3.3 Relationship with employers**

As discussed throughout this section, the barriers that homeless jobseekers manage are complex and, even when they are considered job ready, it is difficult for them to find and sustain work. So far, the discussion has centred on the relationship between jobseekers and service providers; however, employers are also critical to achieving successful outcomes. This project did not incorporate employers in the research design. Nevertheless, it was clear that homeless jobseekers' perceptions of what employers want, and service providers' experiences of working with employers shaped the interaction between jobseekers and service providers.

In line with their relatively traditional views about work, and their individualised sense of themselves as jobseekers, homeless jobseekers articulated why they were not successful in

work in terms of their own shortcomings—lack of references, education, experience or a continuous work history, or struggles with their personal barriers such as relationships, health, or addiction. They viewed these as deficiencies in terms of standards associated with the ideal worker and part of their job-search strategy was to find ways of redressing these deficiencies so that they could be more competitive in the labour market. This was particularly so for those jobseekers who had previous experience in the workplace, as they were more likely to know how the employment process worked. For homeless jobseekers, finding work—preferably decent work—was the goal.

For service providers within JSA, the issue was not finding jobs for jobseekers—as there were often jobs available—but finding an employer willing to employ someone who may not have the characteristics of the ideal worker and who may need ongoing support. Homeless jobseekers are perceived to be a risk to employers and, as a consequence, to the relationship that service providers develop with employers in their area.

*Quite a few of them [homeless jobseekers] will say 'look, I just need to get into work. I need to do this. I'm drowning financially, I can't afford my rent and they're going to kick me out of my house' ... It puts me on a little bit of a knife edge there, where I can see their point and I can see the benefits of getting them employment because it's going to help all those outside issues, but it's a Catch 22 for me where I'm not so much putting my arse on the line, but obviously our business development officer is the guy that markets our clients to prospective employers, so he has to go out there and sing their praises and say how reliable they're going to be and that they're going to do the right thing, that they're going to turn up. He will quiz me and go 'is there going to be anything with this guy that's going to slip up?' We actually have a client referral sheet we give to him to actually mark our clients—'do they turn up to their appointments, they do have a licence, they do have a car, they're not in jeopardy of losing their home', all those sorts of things. If there's any crosses on those boxes you can guarantee that he will be hesitant to actually put them forward for it, because we may burn an employer. He works hard and goes out on the road to introduce himself and to put [name] out there on the map, so we have to be very, very careful about the clients that we actually put forward for him. SP, Independent JSA, Male, 35-44 years*

As their reputation with employers was crucial to placing other (that is, Stream One and Two) jobseekers, service providers developed strategies to manage and protect their relationships with potential employers. This ranged from managing employer expectations, to being honest about the capacities and capabilities of jobseekers, to having the knowledge about resources and forms of assistance available to employers to manage their risk.

*I think it was the open communication all the way through. I mean the client was absolutely upfront and we were upfront with the employer ... that there are things like employer incentives, for example, a payment after 13 weeks, and then another payment after 26 weeks. If they keep them employed for six months, chances are that they're going to keep them on. A fortnight's free work experience or work trial or something like that, but of course in the case of people who have intellectual or other disabilities the fact that there are supported wage systems. SP, Independent JSA, Female, 55+ years*

*Having that level of understanding that someone might not be the model employee from day one, but then also that that doesn't mean that they're not going to be a model employee from day one as well. Just being flexible in your understandings of how they're going to operate and support them in the workplace, as well as engaging with the other support SP, Welfare Homelessness, Female, 25-34 years*

Limited follow-up assistance is available through JSAs for homeless jobseekers once they get employment. Some service providers thought providing ongoing contact with employers and employees during the transition period was crucial to enhancing the likelihood of success.

Nevertheless the capacity to provide this level of ongoing support was limited by the policy context and culture of service provision within which employment services are constructed for homeless jobseekers. It was also difficult to gauge the extent to which employers thought this would, in fact, make a difference to their inclination to employ—or their capacity to sustain in employment—homeless jobseekers.

## **2.4 Summary**

### **2.4.1 Barriers to finding work**

Homeless jobseekers face a range of barriers when searching for pathways into work. These fell into two broad categories: personal and social and (or) cultural.

**Personal** barriers related to the individual circumstances which affected the search for work for homeless jobseekers. These personal barriers included:

- *Non-vocational* barriers such as their age, whether they had children and the needs associated with this, had been in a violent relationship, had been in prison, were Indigenous, had a physical or mental illness, or any history of substance abuse or addiction; and
- *Vocational* barriers such as a non-existent or intermittent work history, low levels of (English) literacy, lack of relevant skills, and an absence of referees. Participants in this study either had no work experience, in which case they had to learn how to engage with employment-service providers, training organisations, and employers; or they had previous work experience (either long-term intermittent work or continuous employment over several years, with unemployment being relatively recent), which helped them navigate the system but not necessarily help them to get back into work. These participants had higher expectations of getting back into work, although not necessarily with any more success.

These personal barriers have been documented in the literature previously (da Costa Nunez 1995; Ratcliff, Shillito, and Poppe 1996; Acosta and Toro 2000; Theodore 2000; Grace, Batterham, and Cornell 2006; Gilmer et al. 2010). Given the small sample, it was difficult to assess the extent to which each of these barriers contributed to the difficulties of finding work. This was particularly so because the homeless jobseekers in this study often had multiple personal barriers and differences were likely to exist not only in the cumulative effect of such barriers, but in the ways in which they intersect. Findings from the research indicate that it is likely to be the interaction between barriers that contributes to ongoing difficulties in finding work.

Although the research focused on *homeless* jobseekers, we found that the definition of homelessness based on minimum community standards (as in Table 1) was insufficient to capture the impact that the experience (present or past) of homelessness has on jobseekers. Indeed, many of our participants identified as being homeless, even though they would not

be classified as such using accepted definitions. Homelessness may well have long-term consequences as a barrier to employment.

**Social and cultural** barriers related to the ways in which social processes are structured or organised such that homeless jobseekers are disadvantaged. These included:

- The notion of the *ideal jobseeker* and the ideal, linear jobseeker pathway which underpinned employment pathways, perceptions of job readiness, and the management of jobseeker and employer expectations;
- The lack of supportive *social resources*—family, friends, networks—which homeless jobseekers can access and depend upon during the pathway into employment. Although homeless jobseekers may have social resources that enable them to survive periods of precarious housing, these resources did not appear to be useful in the transition into mainstream employment;
- The capacity to access and have *continuity* of service provision given that most employment services are in a fixed location, in a set geographical catchment area, and are operational during standard office hours. In contrast, homeless jobseekers were often transient, lacked transport options, were constantly reacting to immediate crises in their lives, and often expressed frustration, shame, and a lack of confidence to present themselves to new service providers continually;
- The *stigma* of being homeless, which resulted in the lack of disclosure during interviews with Centrelink or JSAs and subsequent problems in providing the appropriate levels of employment services;
- Outside social enterprises, there were limited models of employment available to homeless jobseekers. Work was primarily viewed as occurring in a for-profit organisation, with employers seeking to maximise efficiency and profit. Even with government incentives, homeless jobseekers were often viewed by service providers as a financial *risk* for employers.

#### **2.4.2 Understanding the role of services**

There was a significant difference between the role of social enterprises and that of JSAs and homeless welfare services. The two social enterprises in the study provided employment opportunities for homeless jobseekers and were similar only inasmuch as they both framed work around the jobseeker, rather than the employer. The Big Issue offered work that could be transitional, intermittent, or permanent depending on the needs and capabilities of particular jobseekers. STREAT offered work that was combined with training and general support for young homeless jobseekers, with the goal of them transitioning into the mainstream hospitality industry.

The social enterprises provided a contrast to the approach to finding work used by JSAs, which are an employment service rather than employer. Two of the JSAs participating in the research were located in homelessness welfare organisations; where this occurred, the welfare arm of these organisations also participated in the study. According to service providers, especially within JSA, it was easier to achieve a level of integration between addressing the housing and employment needs of homeless jobseekers where services were co-located. Nevertheless, there was still some tension within these services about which took

priority. In contrast, most of the JSAs in the study operated independently and relied on referral networks to address the non-vocational barriers being experienced by particular jobseekers.

The role of employment services was mediated by the policy context in which they operated, particularly the contractual arrangements through which service funding was tied to quotas and set outcomes. This resulted in organisational cultures in which time allocation and commercial viability were prioritised and thus framed the ways in which services were provided. In particular, it leads to strategies for minimising risks associated with not achieving set outcomes, and to the tendency to focus on likely achievers or on a small number of complex clients. The mainstreaming of services for homeless jobseekers has meant that services were not well placed to work with jobseekers experiencing complex disadvantage. For example, staff did not always have the training or experience to understand appropriately the non-vocational barriers, or the life context within which homeless jobseekers sought work. In addition, mainstreaming meant that homeless jobseekers had to compete with jobseekers in other streams for work within the same agency. The JSA providers' need to maintain relationships with employers meant that the best jobseeker was put forward as a potential employee. It appeared difficult to be an advocate for homeless jobseekers within this setting.

Despite the policy and organisational context, individual service providers genuinely seemed to want to do the best they could to achieve positive outcomes for jobseekers with complex disadvantage. However, it was individuals rather than service organisations that made the difference to homeless jobseekers. Often these service providers worked beyond expectations to achieve successful outcomes with homeless jobseekers. Although intensive case management, advocacy, and continuity of engagement were identified as being important for engaging homeless jobseekers in their employment pathways, this was difficult to achieve with any consistency. For homeless jobseekers, it sometimes seemed like a matter of luck as to whether engaging with service providers would help them to find work.

Although JSAs provide support to address both vocational and non-vocational barriers, in reality the extent to which non-vocational barriers were addressed depended on the referral networks of particular service providers. The fragmentation of services, however, often meant that homeless jobseekers had to visit multiple services across different locations which, as indicated above, created access issues. It also resulted in a lack of cohesion in the approach taken towards finding work, and to conflicting messages regarding priorities: work versus housing. Although recognising the need to have these barriers addressed, the main role of JSA service providers was in overcoming vocational barriers such as training, work experience, resume writing, providing job-search strategies, and assisting jobseekers to become job ready. There was a particular emphasis on training, despite few examples of how it directly assisted homeless jobseekers to get into work. Far more examples were given of how training raised jobseekers' expectations, which then needed to be rebuilt when work was not forthcoming. There was also the problem that unless training was linked to employment outcomes, homeless jobseekers could be locked into ongoing cycles of training. Where this occurs, the goal of job readiness turns into a process in which service providers have to manage jobseekers' expectations and disappointments constantly. This was said to be particularly difficult where a jobseeker's self-esteem is low, if they have a mental illness, or if a crisis intervenes to break the continuity of service.

## **3 Discussion: Implications of the Research**

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This final section builds on some key aspects of the research findings to consider what might help homeless jobseekers to overcome the barriers that they experience in finding work. We do this by linking more broadly to the policy implications of the research some of the theoretical approaches to homelessness and complex disadvantage. The section concludes with some ideas for future research.

### **3.1 Long-term Impact of Homelessness**

Current definitions of homelessness in Australia emphasise housing quality and stability. Census data, for example, are collected according to where participants spent Census night. Similarly, the classification of jobseekers as homeless relies on current housing status (where it is disclosed). What this assessment does not take into account is whether a jobseeker has a history of housing instability.

This history of housing instability may be important for some jobseekers. In this research approximately 40 per cent of participants identifying as homeless were not actually homeless, if assessed in relation to current definitions. Despite not being homeless, these participants did identify as homeless and were virtually indistinguishable from those who were currently experiencing housing instability in terms of the types of other vocational and non-vocational barriers they needed to address in finding work.

In this sense, homelessness has become an identity or subject position. Farrugia's (2011) research on young people experiencing homelessness helps us to understand how this might occur. He argues that for some people, homelessness becomes an embodied subjectivity (that is, people *feel* homeless) constructed through an individual's experience of being homeless, but also the symbolic burden of society's view of homelessness (p.84-85). This symbolic burden is a reflection of how homeless people are perceived by society more broadly: for example, as inferior, irresponsible, morally suspect, and dirty (p.72-73). This becomes internalised by people experiencing unstable housing, who then come to view themselves as deficient. This individualised view of failure (and of their capacity to overcome this failure) and disempowerment is one that was often reinforced in interactions with welfare and employment organisations and employers.

Being homeless can therefore impact on identity construction in ways that outlast the actual experience of homelessness. Understanding the long-term impact of housing instability—beyond the period of actual homelessness—is therefore necessary if the appropriate types of services are to be provided for the jobseekers who have experienced homelessness.

### **3.2 Relationships between Services**

As indicated in the findings, in order to become work ready, homeless jobseekers often need assistance from a range of service providers. For the jobseekers in this study, this might include employment, housing, food, medical, psychological, legal, and family services, as well as agencies to deal with gambling, drug abuse, and domestic violence. The co-ordination of these services is a key factor in achieving employment outcomes for jobseekers with complex non-vocational and vocational barriers to finding work. Improving the level of co-ordination is therefore important.

The co-ordination of housing and employment services was found to be a particular issue for participants in the study. The timing and spatial elements of housing versus work for homeless jobseekers impact on their ability to have access to employment (for example, transport, employment opportunities in accessible areas) and continuity in employment-service provision. Maintaining engagement with JSA service providers was identified as a key factor in achieving employment outcomes, yet when a homeless jobseeker found housing, and when this contact was broken, the jobseeker had to develop relationships with a new employment-service provider. Finding better ways to co-ordinate housing and employment services would therefore benefit homeless jobseekers.

The co-location of services made service integration easier. Unless JSAs were co-located with welfare services, however, service integration was achieved through the referral networks of individual service providers. The development of structural partnerships between relevant services would remove the ad hoc nature of service integration and decrease the reliance on individual knowledge and networks. Given the levels of mobility among JSA service providers (11 of the 17 had been with their current employer for less than two years<sup>13</sup>), developing a more systematic process for inter-agency working is likely to improve the consistency of the quality of service provision for homeless jobseekers.

Achieving consistency in the availability and quality of services made service integration particularly difficult in rural and regional areas. Although only based on information from one rural JSA, this issue bears further investigation. The problem was said to be partly due to a more general lack of services for people experiencing homelessness. Information about the experiences of homeless jobseekers in rural and regional areas, and an environmental scan of available services would assist in developing measures to address this issue.

A different approach to service integration would be to provide employment services based on a model of intensive case management. The Social Inclusion Unit's *Building Family Opportunities Program* (SA) and DEEWR's *Family Centred Employment Program* both focus on achieving employment outcomes for families experiencing complex disadvantage through intensive case management and through the development of partnerships with employers and service providers. These three-year programs have only recently been implemented and their evaluation is yet to be undertaken.<sup>14</sup> One of the objectives of these programs is to 'improve the responsiveness of systems and services in order to meet the workforce participation needs of members of long-term jobless families' (Moskos et al. 2009). Having this kind of objective embedded in the service-delivery model for homeless jobseekers would go some way towards addressing issues regarding the integration of services. This would, however, require addressing the funding model, especially for JSAs, which currently emphasises short-term outcomes. This short-term model creates a disincentive to the high levels of investment of time and resources in partnership building and in the intensive case management required to achieve long-term outcomes associated with working with jobseekers with complex disadvantage.

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<sup>13</sup> The mobility within employment services could be a consequence of the competitive process of tendering for contracts and changes in policy directions. For example, the implementation of JSA resulted in changes in the organisations that won contracts.

<sup>14</sup> NILS has been commissioned to conduct the evaluation for the *Building Family Opportunities Program* which includes one region of the *Family Centred Employment Program*.

### **3.3 Flexibility and Security in Employment Pathways**

The employment pathways currently available to homeless jobseekers are limited. The examples provided by the social enterprises in the study illustrate that providing more flexible pathways can be successful.

Social enterprises are able to reframe notions of work and job readiness around the jobseeker. This contrasts to JSAs, which focus primarily on the needs of employers and on ensuring that jobseekers meet the standards required, so that service providers' relationships with employers can be maintained. Jobseekers, however, come to employment services with a range of capabilities, skills, experiences, and barriers. While they are prepared to engage in various activities that may help them to become job ready, few are likely to meet the criteria of an ideal jobseeker. In reality, employment opportunities for homeless jobseekers in mainstream employment (for-profit businesses) are perceived by employment consultants—and possibly employers—to be limited, and there is a risk that jobseekers will be caught in a cycle of continuous training, service provision, hope, and frustration.

Different forms of work could be made available that extend employment options both within and outside mainstream employment. Social enterprises may provide one option for this type of employment. They have the capacity to offer flexible pathways into work by (a) allowing employees to use their employment in a social enterprise as either a transitional route into mainstream employment, or as an alternative source of wage income; and (b) linking training to employment outcomes, which increases the level of engagement and successful outcomes.

In Europe, the role of what they call 'work integration social enterprises' has been documented in a number of papers emanating from research commissioned by the European Commission, which spanned 11 countries in the early to mid 2000s (see, for example, Spear 2002; Schulz 2003). There is a range of models for the development of social enterprises, and their use differs across countries. However, they have been viewed as having a role in work integration for people experiencing complex disadvantage, or who are at risk of social exclusion. There is the possibility of shared learning from this research and examining the ways in which such models could be translated to the Australian context.

In addition to flexibility, the research findings indicated that more secure or long-lasting employment pathways were also required: that is, pathways that not only get homeless jobseekers into work, but that can keep them there. While there may be a role for service providers in sustaining homeless jobseekers in the workplace, a gap in this research is about what can be done to support employers to (a) be open to employing homeless jobseekers, and (b) provide secure, ongoing work for them. Mostly, employment opportunities for homeless jobseekers are restricted to positions that are casual and precarious, with low pay and poor working conditions. This type of work does not provide homeless jobseekers with the level of security or stability required to assist them in the transition out of homelessness or joblessness.

While the government has programs offering financial support to employers of disadvantaged jobseekers, employers are said still to be reluctant to take the risk. This is despite the fact that the rate of unemployment is low and that there are claims of widespread skills shortages. These shortages are for skilled people, whereas the homeless jobseekers in this study did not have the required skills. Accordingly, they do not seem to benefit from the

overall prosperity of Australia. There are programs aimed at raising awareness among CEOs and employers, such as St Vincent de Paul's CEO Sleepout. While increasing numbers are joining the sleepout and a considerable amount of money is raised, the extent to which this type of awareness-raising translates into employment outcomes is unknown.

Whether other factors would influence employers to hire homeless jobseekers is also largely unknown. There is an assumption among service providers that employers are averse to employing anyone who presents a risk to a business, whether financially or to their reputation. However, some employers have programs that provide supported pathways into employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. Toll's Second Step Program, for example, provides opportunities for jobseekers who have a criminal or drug addiction background (Toll n.d.). They employ around 30 people per year (in Australia) under this program in the belief that employment offers people the chance of breaking out of cycles of criminal activity and drug abuse. Toll is a large company that undertakes this program as part of their community-engagement responsibility. Understanding the extent to which other companies offer similar programs, and the commonalities and differences between the programs, would provide information towards building an evidence base about good practice in this area. At another level, information is also required about the how smaller companies could be supported and resourced to provide similar types of opportunities for homeless jobseekers.

### **3.4 Interdependent Jobseekers**

Underpinning service and practice models within employment services is an assumption that independence is a highly desirable quality among jobseekers; a successful individual is one who is not heavily reliant upon others; independence from government and government support is certainly a premise of welfare-to-work programs. One aspect of this research, however, suggested that independence from government places homeless jobseekers in a vulnerable position, because they either do not have other sources of social or personal support or, if they do, they are not the kind that would provide the social capital required for finding and sustaining work.

Independence from government programs and support requires that people have healthy social networks and support, the social capital to know what to do, and the cultural capital to access this knowledge. It could be argued that while employed people may be independent of government support, they are *interdependent* in many other ways on their families, friends, networks, colleagues, and the broader community to sustain them in employment. It might also be argued that the government does provide support to people who are employed through taxation expenditures and the provision or subsidy of services (Wilson, Spies-Butcher, and Stebbing 2009).

The expectation that homeless jobseekers be independent is therefore problematic. First, it unfairly distinguishes between government support offered through the welfare system and that offered through the taxation system. Second, homeless jobseekers often do not have the family, friends, and social networks to provide the support required to access and sustain employment and housing. Where they have developed support systems while homeless, these are mostly useful in surviving homelessness, rather than for engaging in the workforce. Third, some of the homeless jobseekers in this study had internalised into their world view the need to be independent, and they were reluctant to seek assistance for tasks that they thought were their responsibility. In so doing, they risked becoming even further isolated and socially excluded. Fourth, independent jobseekers are rarely truly independent, and

maintaining the illusion that some people are independent establishes a benchmark that homeless jobseekers are unlikely to achieve: it sets them up for failure.

An alternative to the discourse of independence is one of *interdependence*. This would recognise the importance of engaging in activities aimed at building social networks and developing social capital, and it would be a fairer depiction of how people manage their work and personal lives. Interdependence is being recognised as providing a more useful framework for service provision when clients experience complex disadvantage, including being at risk of social isolation or exclusion (Goodkind and Foster-Fisherman 2002; Propp, Ortega, and NewHeart 2003). It might also shift service provision towards an advocacy model which places the jobseeker, rather than employers, at the centre, and which provides continuity of services beyond the first weeks of employment. A service provider would be a social resource for a jobseeker until they develop their social networks as workers. The development of interdependence would require management from both the jobseeker and the service provider.

A model of service provision based on interdependence would also recognise that the community has a responsibility toward jobseekers experiencing homelessness. This involves recognising that attaining and maintaining employment usually involves a number of people beyond the jobseeker. Supportive relationships need to be maintained throughout the entire process, rather than expecting jobseekers to succeed by themselves. This goes beyond formal service provision to engaging other populations in the community (for example, employers, educators, co-workers) to help to address homelessness and unemployment. Some organisations are attempting to raise awareness within the business community. This is, however, just a first step. Strategies are required for increasing awareness about and engagement with homeless jobseekers across a wide range of social institutions.

## 4 Conclusion

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This pilot research had two aims. One was to inform the development of a broader research project, and the other was to identify ways in which policies and programs could be more effective in assisting jobseekers who were experiencing homelessness to engage in the labour market. In this final section we bring together the discussion in the report to provide a brief overview of how the project might inform future research and policy directions.

### 4.1 *Implications for Research Directions*

1. Examine the long-term impact of homelessness on joblessness, beyond the period of achieving a home. Options could include:
  - Integrating a long-term perspective into the dataset on homelessness that is currently being developed.
  - Investigating ideas of home and stability amongst jobseekers experiencing homelessness and how this impacts on their long-term perception of themselves as homeless, even when housed.
2. Examine the impact of funding models on service integration and employment outcomes for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. This could include drawing on other models of service provision that focus on clients with complex disadvantage.
3. Investigate the role of employers in shaping ideas of job readiness and providing employment opportunities for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. This might include:
  - Conducting an environmental scan on existing programs offered by employers to achieve a transition for jobseekers with complex disadvantage into mainstream work. Identify the elements of the programs, and the characteristics of employers providing these programs, to analyse those aspects that could be transferable to other employment contexts.
  - Gaining a better understanding of the qualities as well as skills that employers seek when employing people who experience complex disadvantage.
  - Investigating the types of financial and non-financial support that employers would need for them to open up more employment opportunities for jobseekers experiencing homelessness.

### 4.2 *Implications for Policy Directions*

1. Reframing homelessness as being a significant ongoing barrier to employment beyond the period of statistical homelessness will impact on the assessment process for streaming clients in JSA, and the levels of intensive case management required for finding and sustaining work.
2. Improving the integration of services that do not rely on the personal networks of individual service providers will enable jobseekers experiencing homelessness to address better their vocational and non-vocational barriers to working. This integration would require formal partnerships between different government and non-

government agencies that are effective on the ground. It would also require taking a more person-centred approach to working with the jobseekers that is structurally supported through funding mechanisms, partnerships, and human-resource development.

3. Creating more flexibility and security for jobseekers in employment pathways will affect how goals and outcomes are defined for both jobseekers and service providers. This would involve a greater engagement with employers in recognising their role in addressing long-term joblessness amongst homeless populations.
4. Homeless jobseekers could be reframed as interdependent, rather than independent. Recognising the importance of interdependence may move service providers into an advocacy role for jobseekers and rethinking the kinds of employment pathways that are relevant for these jobseekers. The importance of having a trusting relationship with someone who can mentor them and advocate for them, over a long period of time, would provide stability for the jobseekers who are experiencing homelessness.

## Appendix 1: Employment service provision in the context of homelessness

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The nature of insecure housing presents difficulties for 'policymakers and practitioners who are required to provide homeless young people with the services normally provided by a stable home environment' (Broadbent 2008 p.30). Stably housed jobseekers engage with jobseeking using personal and social resources that people experiencing homelessness often cannot access. This is partially recognised in the ways in which employment services are structured for jobseekers who are experiencing homelessness.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to 2009, employment services for jobseekers experiencing homelessness were provided through the Job Placements, Employment, and Training program (JPET), the Personal Support Program (PSP), or Job Networks. JPET provided assistance for young people, aged 15 to 21 years, who were homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to overcome their non-vocational barriers and to achieve greater economic and social participation. Getting participants to engage in employment and education were fundamental to JPET. A review of the program found that while reasonably good employment and the outcomes associated with becoming financially independent were achieved, a large cohort of clients remained unemployed two years after commencing the program (DEEWR 2007, p.34). PSP provided sequential assistance (personal support, then employment services) to people with multiple personal barriers to economic and social participation. In a review of PSP, employment assistance provided within it was found to be minimal, and ad hoc, failing to recognise the importance of work to the client group. Problems were found with the lack of integration between personal and employment support, and the difficulties of transferring clients to the Job Network (Perkins 2007, p.124).

Job Network, the precursor to Job Services Australia, operated from 1998 to 2008. Job Network contracted out employment services to providers, who operated within a tight fiscal and regulatory framework (Fowkes 2011). The mainstreaming of services for people with multiple and complex barriers to employment occurred over a few years. Initially, Job Networks provided three streams of services, with Stream Three having intensive support. In 2003, the services were 'combined into a single program (the Active Participation Model) and the Intensive Assistance ... phase became more prescribed' (Fowkes 2011, p.5). In a review of the performance of Job Networks for achieving outcomes for people with complex disadvantage, Fowkes argues that less than half of the participants were employed after 12 months, and less than 20 per cent were in full-time work (2011, p.11).

Since 2009 the primary employment service has been **Job Services Australia** (JSA). Funded by DEEWR, it represents an amalgamation of a number of former employment contracts into one, including Job Network and the specialist support programs for disadvantaged (especially homeless) jobseekers, particularly JPET and PSP. JSA contracts were allocated to for-profit and not-for-profit providers in two thousand locations across the country (O'Conner 2009). Of these providers 60 are specialist providers, which service all jobseekers, but provide a specialist service for identified disadvantaged populations. Of the 60 specialist providers, there are five that specialise in servicing jobseekers who are

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<sup>6</sup>. Specialist employment services for people with a disability or mental illness have not been covered in this report. It is recognised, however, that some homeless jobseekers would access services through these programs.

experiencing homelessness—three agencies in Victoria and two in South Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2010).

In order to provide for the needs of all jobseekers, JSA includes four different streams that cater for those who are job ready (Stream One) through to those with significant barriers to work (Stream Four). The streamed approach provides recognition that jobseekers experiencing disadvantage require additional services, support, time, and flexibility in order to find and maintain employment.

On entering the JSA system, jobseekers are interviewed by Centrelink officers and are allocated to one of the four streams based on the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI), depending on their readiness for work. If a jobseeker is likely to be allocated to Stream Four, they must also undergo a Jobs Capacity Assessment by Centrelink (or other designated assessor). This assessment is conducted before the jobseeker is referred for service to a JSA provider. Getting a jobseeker's classification right is critical, as it determines the level and type of service to which they are entitled from a provider, and also the job-search activities that they are required to undertake.

There are two main components of JSA services: the development of an employment-pathway plan and access to the employment-pathway fund. The fund aims to provide a flexible pool of resources to enable jobseekers to address their individual needs and their barriers to employment; it can be accessed to cover, for example, training costs, work-related clothing, short-term travel costs, relocation costs, and other personal support services (DEEWR 2011). Jobseekers experiencing homelessness fall within Stream Four and are eligible for these more intensive services to meet their vocational and non-vocational needs.

The aim of JSA providers is to ensure that jobseekers experiencing homelessness are job ready. Job readiness encapsulates the skill capacities, work experience, and job-search strategies which enable participation in the labour market. For jobseekers experiencing homelessness, engagement in training programs is often required. However, the nature of homelessness and its impact on the development of human capital mean that many jobseekers experiencing homelessness cannot meet the minimum requirements of a job-training program, nor can they access the resources to manage training pathways (Broadbent 2008). It is too early to evaluate the impact of JSAs on employment for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. As such, this research provides a qualitative analysis of the experience of jobseekers experiencing homelessness in engaging with JSAs.

It is recognised that the integration of training with assessment and case-management support services has been successful in enabling homeless individuals to secure and retain jobs, and that this can contribute to housing stability (Beck et al. 1997; Trutko et al. 1998). However, addressing the complex disadvantage, lack of human and social capital, and structural barriers that jobseekers experiencing homelessness face presents challenges for employment-service providers who work within formal organisational boundaries, including funding constraints. Barlowski et al. (2007), for example, noted that employment-service providers in America were ill-equipped to handle the complexity of achieving job readiness for jobseekers experiencing homelessness, either because they lacked the understanding or did not have structural support to provide the relevant services. As a result, employment programs catered most successfully to those jobseekers with higher levels of human capital and lower levels of complex disadvantage, including structural inequality. Jobseekers experiencing homelessness can also be further disadvantaged by the unintended

consequences of employment and training programs. This occurred in the Victorian Government's Youth Employment Education and Training Initiative program. Brokerage funds were available to jobseekers who were experiencing homelessness to access education and training, however, the project evaluation identified the main beneficiaries of the program as being private educational institutions, rather than the targeted homeless population (Broadbent 2008).

Some argue that those experiencing multiple and interacting barriers to employment require *support-first* approaches, where intensive support that is not connected to employment preparation is provided before moving people into job search. For example, in addressing the multiple barriers that jobseekers experiencing homelessness face, crisis issues and cycles of mental health and (or) drug and alcohol problems tend to be dealt with first (National Youth Commission 2008). This approach was offered under the previous PSP. In the support-first approach non-vocational issues are likely to be given priority in service provision, even if a client claims that they would like to seek employment first.

Practitioners have historically focused on providing people with access to safe and affordable housing and supportive services, usually addressing employment later in the continuum ... employment [is] an unrecognized and underutilized practice for preventing and ending homelessness (Shaheen and Rio 2007, p.341).

While the non-vocational barriers experienced by homeless jobseekers need to be addressed, introducing the job-seeking process later in the process may be detrimental to sustaining housing outcomes. As such, others propose *work-first* or employment-focused support, such as rapid work placement, on the basis that timely connection to work is considered a pivotal part of recovery or of the reduction in disadvantage (Parkinson and Horn 2002; Kemp and Neale 2005; Perkins 2007) and leads to successful outcomes in gaining emotional stability, financial independence, and housing (Ratcliff, Shillito, and Poppe 1996, p.87). There is also evidence suggesting that some disadvantaged jobseekers need a ladder approach to help them into work. The ladder for some may be needed for several years as they move in and out of jobs, and education and training, in an effort to 'build a portfolio of skills' (Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce 2001, p.93).

The interaction between organisations that provide services to jobseekers experiencing homelessness is therefore an important factor in the success, or otherwise, of preparing homeless jobseekers for engagement in the labour market. Central to this is the *relationship* between employment and housing-service providers. While one argument is that the outcome of housing, health, and personal development programs are affected by employment outcomes (Horn 2003), the reverse is also true. The question of which should come first—housing or employment—is pertinent.

Perhaps the most successful outcomes would be where housing is offered alongside employment (especially low-impact jobs) as a means of building motivation to find and sustain work (Rio et al. 1999; Long and Amendolia 2003). This would mean taking an integrated approach to homelessness job services, requiring inter-agency conversations to be introduced early in the interactions with jobseekers experiencing homelessness (Camardese and Youngman 1996; Rio et al. 1999; Cook et al. 2001).

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