

2023

OurHouse

A LAUNCH HOUSING MAGAZINE



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Launch
HOUSING

IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS

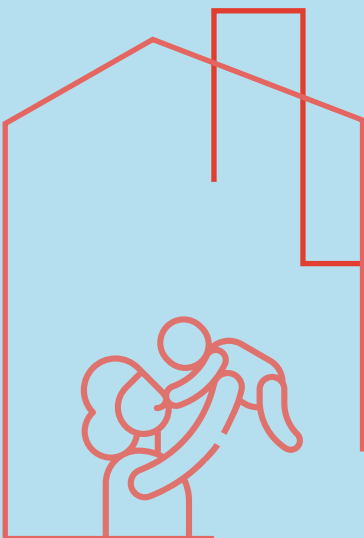
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If you are in crisis call
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Hello reader!

Welcome to *Our House*. Thank you for picking up our little magazine.

In these pages you will find stories of our Melbourne community – of artists, change-makers, leaders and others who are making our city a better place to live.

Our House celebrates what it means to be a Melburnian. To us, that's a special blend of innovation, compassion and, of course, creativity. In these pages you'll read about some wonderful things happening in our city, but also some of the challenges we must all come together to solve. And solutions are out there!

We hope you enjoy these stories from our city, from our house.

Thanks for stopping by.

Our House team

ABOUT US:

Our House comes from Launch Housing and its community of supporters and partners. Launch Housing is a Melbourne based organisation providing housing and homelessness services to thousands of people experiencing housing crisis.

Our mission is to end homelessness.



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Melbourne, the movement to end homelessness has begun

JANITA SUTER

Marketing & Community Engagement Manager, Launch Housing

Imagine a Melbourne where no one sleeps on the streets... Melburnians are joining the call to make this a reality.



On Valentines Day 2023, Melbourne Zero, a passionate movement to end street homelessness in Melbourne, was ignited from a love letter.

The letter, published in The Age, was signed by the founding members of the Melbourne Zero Network - a diverse alliance of Melbourne-based businesses, brands, organisations, and community groups publicly calling for change and taking practical actions to make zero homelessness a reality in our city.

The campaign, powered by Launch Housing, has drawn support from over 1,300 Melburnians who have added their voice to Melbourne Zero's call for change.

"Melbourne Zero recognises that our leaders already know how to end rough sleeping. What's

missing is a mandate from the community that will green light government action," said Launch Housing CEO Bevan Warner.

In addition to demonstrating Melburnians' desire for a more inclusive city for all, the Melbourne Zero campaign is dedicated to amplifying the voices, experiences and diversity of people who have lived through homelessness to build empathy and understanding. Five Melburnians generously shared their stories and perspectives to help create change for people experiencing homelessness.

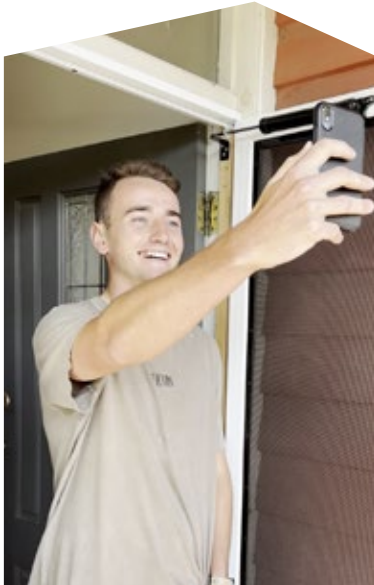
"When you become homeless, you don't actually share it with anyone. You hide it because you feel ashamed. We need to break that stigma, and homeless people feel that stigma. We need to break it and we need to give them love. We need

to give people the help that they need," says Susan, Lived Experience Advocate who has shared her voice in the campaign.

Additionally, posters featuring each participant in the doorway of their safe, stable and affordable housing were displayed around Melbourne City, St Kilda, and Collingwood.

"Everyone can do something. There's a positive impact that can be made by one person doing something. Just talking about it, just raising awareness that can change things," says Beth, Lived Experience Advocate.

Watch stories of people who have experienced homelessness in Melbourne at melbournezero.org.au/stories.



“Melbourne is a kind city. If enough of us say we want change, there is no reason Melbourne can’t be a world leading city in ending street homelessness,”
– Launch Housing CEO Bevan Warner.

Since Melbourne Zero’s launch in February, the Melbourne community have shown their Melbourne Zero solidarity by sharing their own “Doortrait” – a portrait taken in a doorway with a personal message about why they’ve joined the movement and a call for their peers to do the same.

Melbourne Zero Network members have been taking practical actions to drive change, bringing an array of diverse skills and specialisations to the table. Commercial fitout company SHAPE, and their contractors, have donated time, labour and building materials to refurbish 20 crisis accommodation rooms in Southbank and e-Scooter rental company, Neuron Mobility, are promoting the Melbourne Zero campaign to riders, encouraging them to add their voice to the campaign and take actions to end homelessness.

This is just the beginning for the movement which will continue to call on Melburnians, businesses, and organisations to push for greater focus and scaling up of known solutions to street homelessness.



Don't walk past the issue.

Take action today.

We're a caring city - let's show it by publicly calling for change and taking action, together. There are many actions we each can take to help end homelessness in Melbourne.

If you've only got 5 minutes – you can make a difference today.

Visit melbournezero.org.au to add your voice to the movement today.

Melbourne, zero homelessness is possible.

Beth's Story

Beth shared her story as a part of Melbourne Zero to advocate for change.

Hi, I'm Beth. I'm 25 and I experienced homelessness in Melbourne for three years.

My experience of homelessness happened very quickly, and I didn't realise it was happening around me at all. I was experiencing poor mental health and this time was very confronting and blurry because it was all so surreal. I think, emotionally, I switched off to save myself a little bit.

I experienced sleeping rough for nine months consecutively, in the CBD, which is rough. It is very rough.

“When you become homeless, people think “oh well, you put yourself in this situation” but when I look back I can say I didn’t, and I didn’t want any of that.

I was sleeping in car parks or if I was brave enough alleyways, but there's only so many places in the CBD that you can hide yourself and be safe. I'm such a small girl and had large amounts of luggage, suitcases full of clothes and everything had accumulated over time.

When you're homeless, you realise how resourceful you are. I was very good at finding free food and places to shower, but a lot of the time there wasn't an opportunity for me to do that. It wasn't always easy to live.

When you're not keeping up with your physical health, and your mental health goes with that, if you're not managing those things, everything just kind of falls out from under you.

Throughout the period I was experiencing homelessness, I did have private rentals on and off. I was living in these for three months or four

months, or maybe even two weeks. And the last one that I had, I had planned to stay in for 12 months and the person I was living with didn't pay their share of the rent, so - evicted.

The week that I got evicted, I found out I was pregnant. So I had a choice to make a big one, and I realized that there was something more important than me coming into this world and I needed to be a world for that thing. **So I called Launch Housing and I said, “Hey, I've called before. I've tried to get help from you before, but this time, it's not just me that needs help.”**

The support I received from Launch Housing was impeccable. The day that I called, someone said “we'll call you in two hours and we'll talk to you then”.

In my mind I thought okay, sure. I went ahead and figured out where I was going to sleep that night, as an autopilot reflex. But two hours later someone called me.



We did an assessment on the phone and the support worker said, "okay, so we've booked you into a hotel to stay for a few nights." I thought *wow, someone's actually helping me. I don't have to sleep in a car park tonight. I've got, I've got a roof for a few days.*

That few days actually turned into two weeks, and it was incredible how fast that turnaround was and how someone had supported me more than any of my friends or family had in the last few years after just one phone call.

Melburnians need to understand the stigma attached to homelessness is wild. It's not necessarily the person, it's the circumstances that they're faced with. **It's disappointing to me that homelessness is often seen in one way, or judged on one scale, when there's so much going on to cause it.**

I've been living in my apartment now for three months, but I have been on this journey to stability for eight. In this I've sought help from mental health professionals and I'm on a lot of pregnancy vitamins. I'm giving my body a chance to, for the first time ever, just sort of stop, do what it's meant to do, give my head a chance to be what it's meant to be.

Now that I've got stability, I can actually maintain all of that.

Melbourne, zero homelessness is possible



Watch Beth's Story at melbournezero.org.au/stories



HOODIES 4 HOMELESSNESS

Wednesday 19th April 2023

Looking for a simple way to make a difference? Join the Hoodies4Homelessness campaign this April and show your support for young people experiencing homelessness in Australia.

Hoodies4Homelessness is an annual campaign that aims to raise awareness of Youth Homelessness Matters Day – 19 April, and advocate for young people in Australia who experience homelessness.

Why it matters?

With an estimated 28,000 people between the ages of 12-24 experiencing homelessness on any given night, it's more important than ever to raise awareness and demand change. By wearing a hoodie on April 19th when you're going to work, school, or just out and about, you

can make a powerful statement that everyone deserves a safe and secure place to call home. It's a small act that can have a big impact.

Visit www.homie.com.au/hoodies4homelessness to get involved.



Home is where healing can begin

LAURA MAHONEY

Launch Housing Chief Impact Officer

Home. The place where we find safety and shelter from the outside world, where we rest, where we keep our things, where we lay our head each night and where we raise a family.

Home is such a vital part of a person's identity, sense of belonging and overall health and wellbeing. It is also a human right. But for many people, not having a home or somewhere to sleep at night is their reality. **When most people think of homelessness, they think of people sleeping rough. However, homelessness comes in many forms, is both visible and invisible, and is gendered.**

The way women experience homelessness is very different and largely invisible. Women are at much greater risk of experiencing homelessness or housing crisis due to structural and systemic gender-based inequity. They are more likely to be working in lower paid jobs, living below the poverty line and have dependants. They are more likely to have been caring for family members, full and part-time, and to have been partially or completely out of the paid workforce. Women

are also more likely to experience family violence and are less likely to have the financial resources to escape. Increases in interest rates, rising rents and the lack of affordable housing exacerbates the situation.

The fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness is older women, and family and domestic violence is the **largest growing driver of homelessness for women**, particularly those with dependent children. And this situation is becoming more critical.

Many women and their children escaping family and domestic violence will attempt to access crisis accommodation but much of this accommodation is already at capacity, with support services under-resourced to cope with the pressures of current demand. This lack of availability is pushing families into small, often run-down motels, sleeping in their cars, on the streets, couch surfing or returning

to unsafe households.

Many women have to make a devastating choice – stay home in a violent and unsafe situation or enter into homelessness and another unsafe situation.

Each year in Australia over 7,500 women return to violent partners due to having nowhere to live, while more than 9,000 women become homeless as a result of escaping violent homes.

It is unacceptable that we don't have enough suitable options for women and families to find safety and stability at such a critical time of need.

Even if a woman is able to access crisis accommodation, the clock starts ticking the moment she enters this short-term option and there are currently very limited ways forward into permanent housing after this time runs out.

In theory, crisis accommodation provides a short-term stopgap



until medium-term transitional housing, or long-term permanent accommodation becomes available. However, with the realities of social and affordable housing shortages across the country and rental supply and affordability at an all-time low, long-term stability is out of reach for so many families.

This is resulting in an over reliance on emergency accommodation and short-term options which can prolong the period of crisis for women and children, exacerbating trauma and instability, disrupting children's development and engagement with education.

We need to turn our attention to more holistic ways of supporting women and families and expedite the transition to permanent housing so families can rebuild and find stability as soon as possible.

A Housing First approach

to rapidly re-house women into permanent supportive housing will give them the best chance to rebuild their lives. Permanent housing combined with co-located support services is a proven approach that gives women and children a fresh start.

Launch Housing has partnered with Uniting Vic Tas to address a specific gap in affordable permanent housing options for women and children experiencing family violence, and homelessness in Victoria.

This article was first published on the UNDER COVER documentary website. UNDER COVER shines a light on the devastating reality that women over 50 are the fastest growing cohort experiencing homelessness in the country – you can currently watch the documentary on ABC iView.

Known as Viv's Place, the project is the first-of-its-kind in Australia and has opened its doors to up to 60 women and up to 130 children in Dandenong. This includes women over 55, who may also be leaving family violence situations with no financial resources or anywhere safe to live.

In addition to 60 self-contained and furnished apartments, the building has 24-hour support staff and a range of wrap-around support services located in the building, including health, legal, financial, education and living skills specialists. Children have access to counselling services, trauma-informed playgroups, art groups and after school clubs.

The building has been designed with safety, security and a sense of community as core principles. Communal spaces encourage interaction and belonging and have been designed and decorated through a trauma-informed lens. The safety of women and children is central, and has already been recognised by residents as the most fundamental difference to anywhere they have lived before.

This model not only makes it possible for women and children to leave family and domestic violence, it provides them permanent stability

and puts them at the centre of care, bringing support services to their door so they can recover in the safety and security of their own home.

Our hope is that Viv's Place will provide a model for the development of more holistic housing solutions across Australia to give women and children the best opportunity to recover and rebuild their lives.

We need systemic change to address the intersecting housing and family and domestic violence crises that are impacting so many Australian women and families. Real change starts with being bold, measuring impact and scaling up solutions that work.

Viv's Place outdoor play area.





I was homeless at 15

STEPHEN SMITH,

Director and Auctioneer Marshall White Brighton

I feel if I can help provide people a different view on what a homeless person can look like, I can help change perceptions of homelessness and show the potential of every person.

My name is Stephen and I'm a Director and Auctioneer at Marshall White in Brighton.

I'm passionate about my work, my family, and also hold a lifelong love of opera singing. Prior to going into real estate I had a 20-year long career as a classical singer. I still do probably 30 to 40 performances a year and I do it for the love of it.

If you met me, you'd have no idea that I was homeless as a teenager.

Today, people entrust me to sell their homes that are sometimes worth in excess of \$20 million dollars. My experience shows, homelessness can happen to anyone. It's not an identity. It's a stage that some people go through in their lives that they can get through if they receive the right help.

I feel if I can help provide people a different view on what a homeless person can look like, I can help change perceptions of homelessness and show the potential of every person.

I became homeless at 15 years old.

I moved in with my father following a decade in foster care. As I look back over my childhood and teen years, now with a recent diagnosis of ADHD, it makes so much sense that relationship quickly broke down.

We were living in Port Fairy in the Western District of Victoria, and I was, to be frank, just bored and uncontrollable. I decided that coming to Melbourne and leaving school and leaving Port Fairy would be much more exciting. Initially, I was thrilled to be in the city, to be free in the world but it wasn't long until I ran out places to stay and began living in a squats then even spent a few nights sleeping rough – I must say I was lucky that wasn't a big part of my experience.

I was oblivious to the dangers that were around me and it wasn't until I got beaten badly that I realised my vulnerability.

Bloody and barely able to stand, I was taken to the emergency department of the hospital. They didn't even admit me and basically kicked me straight out.

I remember getting back to the squat, to the blood covered room I'd been beaten in, and coming to this overwhelming awareness of having no support, no safety.

When you're homeless it's very difficult to get the help you need. You don't have people to give you advice. You don't have people looking over your shoulder. You don't have the same access to services as other people and you mostly don't have access to income. You're just adrift outside of the system.

I eventually managed to get a car and I lived out of it for about six months.

I had tried other options, even meeting my mother for the first time and staying with her for a period of months. But ultimately, I felt I wasn't home and or where I belonged. Home is really about a place where you feel safe with the people that are important to you. If it's not secure and it's not safe, it's not really a home. At that time, my car was the safest emotional space for me.

There were two key moments in my life that got me through to the other side of homelessness. It was a girl's dad and music.

I had started seeing a girl and her father basically laid down the law and said you can stay with us, but you need to get a job. And I did.

Until this point, there weren't too many people around me saying *you've got this, or you're going to do something wonderful*. So having a person there in front of me with a willingness to help, a willingness to lay down expectations, expectations to live up to rather than down to, was huge.

The next big moment in my life was discovering opera.

I was encouraged to get lessons and then to audition for the Victorian College of the Arts. At that stage it didn't matter if you'd finished school or not, it was all audition based, and so despite having dropped out of school in year nine, I was able to get a bachelor's degree.

I went from having really no commitments and no desires to suddenly having this obsession that would turn out to be my great love for the next 30 years.

I imagine there are a lot of productive people, people just like me, who are not able to do their best for themselves or for others because of circumstances beyond their control.

We all need to ask "what can I do?" and whatever you have to offer up. Just offer it up.

The more people that can engage, the more likely we are to come up with meaningful solutions that stick.

We don't choose the genetics that we're given. We don't choose the challenges that are thrown in front of us. So the more we can do to help people out the other side, the better they do, the better we feel as a society.

As someone who's lived through homelessness I've been determined that my children will always have a safe home with me. And that's a space where emotionally they're safe, a space they know they can come back to any night, any time.

Prior to his successful real estate career, Stephen had a 20-year long career as a classical singer. He still performs around 30 to 40 performances each year for the love of it.



A simple switch to change lives

Property owner Beth Phillips says HomeGround Real Estate offers a new path for people already thinking about creating impact through their investment.



Beth and her husband Andrew learned about HomeGround Real Estate in 2015 when the ATO made a tax ruling specific to HomeGround which provided property owners with deductions for leasing properties at below market rents.

For the couple, this arrangement offered a strong incentive to personally make a difference and increase affordable housing in the market.

"To be living in a country where there are so many wealthy people and at the same time there are people who don't have the basic right of shelter is really sad. If we can't enable people of all different circumstances and backgrounds to live in a country of such prolific wealth like Australia, then where do we end up?" Beth says.

While starting with just a few properties, Beth and Andrew have been able to significantly increase the number properties leased through HomeGround in recent years at both full market and social rent. This was made possible after the sale of their successful business, which made a substantial impact on their circumstances.

The issue of housing stability and affordability is personal to Beth who grew up in foster care and children's homes. Having experienced the extreme ends of

wealth and poverty, her perspective on inequality is unique.

"When I was a child, I was viewed as being at the bottom of the pile. Now I'm seen completely differently because my financial and family circumstances have improved but I'm the exact same person.

"I don't see someone's personal financial situation or the circumstances in the moment as an indicator of who they are. It's just a stage of life they're in and everyone has potential. Everyone has so much potential."

Choosing an ethical path for the investment of their wealth helped the Phillips align their investments with their core values. This is also something the Phillips family work toward through their business **uncommon folk**, which pursues social and environmental change through land sharing, impact investments and social housing.

Through HomeGround Real Estate, the Phillips family aim to create a sustainable property management model where 50% of the properties in their portfolio are leased at a social rental rate, prioritised for people experiencing homelessness or escaping family and domestic violence.

"We figure that if we can set this up as its own sustainable entity, so we are not drawing on the limited

philanthropic funds available, then this can become something that runs itself and provide for people who are at risk of homelessness."

HomeGround Real Estate Manager Samantha Gatherum-Goss says the Phillips are creating meaningful impact.

"The Phillips are enabling people to move into safe and secure, and well-maintained properties who may not otherwise have the capacity to afford those properties."

"These are people who may be leaving a domestic violence situation or people who are vulnerable for whatever reason. The Phillips are providing an opportunity for them to have secure housing. A lot of our rental providers do the same thing and they're just incredible."

For people considering making the switch to HomeGround Real Estate for their property management needs, Beth says there is no difference on an administrative level, the difference is in the quality of service.

"The people I've dealt with at HomeGround are working for something they believe in which enables them to do the job that much better than anyone else I've dealt with. They are invigorated and empowered by the contribution they're making."

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It's time to end street deaths

DAVID PEARSON

CEO, Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

In communities across Australia, it's a tragic fact that people are dying whilst homeless every year. Health and homelessness are intrinsically linked, and international studies have shown that experiencing rough sleeping homelessness can reduce life expectancy by approximately 30 years; and that as many as one in three deaths were attributable to conditions that could have been prevented or treated.



We need metrics, evidence, and data to inform key decisions and determine priorities, like government policy and budget allocation. That's why we measure things like the unemployment rate and road fatalities.

Yet, currently, there is no national system or database that measures

how many people are experiencing homelessness in a community and what their needs are – particularly health – and then set about meeting those needs, both housing and support.

Ultimately, though, Australia needs a consistent nationwide

Each death of a person experiencing homelessness is a tragedy and an ultimate systemic failure, but it can be fixed.

If we want to drive change in this area, we need to measure and publicly report on the fact that people are dying across our country without a safe place to call home. With a solid federal and community-based approach, we can work together to put an end to the often-preventable deaths of people experiencing homelessness.



If you want to make a real difference to the lives of people experiencing homelessness, get involved with Melbourne Zero and make your voice heard by writing to your local MP.

and tracks how many people are dying whilst homeless, who they are, or where this is happening. Without this information, how are we to drive and measure change?

The good news is that there are already some systems in place in communities across Australia that can shift the dial on this problem and even help to end homelessness for good. Zero projects are leading the way through the implementation of something called By-Name Lists, which are part of the Advance to Zero approach to ending homelessness.

By-Name Lists help us to gather real-time information about people experiencing homelessness in communities to make sure we can match them to the right support services. As a part of this work, we can build an understanding of

approach to work hand in hand with community action. The best way for this to happen is for the Commonwealth Government to take a leadership role – this is why the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness has called for the development of a national homelessness deaths and life expectancy gap reporting framework. This framework should:

- set out how to improve data capture
- drive more accurate measures of homelessness in hospital and coronial administrative data
- articulate the number of deaths among people experiencing homelessness in addition to their age and cause of death at local, state/territory and national levels
- seek to report on this data in as close to real-time as possible.

We need to remind all governments that keeping people safe is one of their most basic and fundamental responsibilities, and with adequate funding, we can fight to stop the needless deaths of people on our streets and prevent it from ever happening in future. In the meantime, implementing By-Name Lists at a local level means we can look out for the most vulnerable people in our communities and help to meet their needs.

Other countries have shown us that ending homelessness is possible through this approach, so why not here too?

Launch
HOUSING

IT'S TIME TO END
HOMELESSNESS

A safe home for all is vital

Make a difference for
someone in crisis



Sponsor a room for **just \$30 a month** to provide safety and support for people in housing crisis today.

launchhousing.org.au/sponsor-a-room