



RRR NETWORK

RRR Roundtable

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AFFORDABLE SOCIAL HOUSING AND HOW TO END HOMELESSNESS ACROSS REGIONAL WA

The homelessness rate in Australia increased by about 12 per cent between 2011 and 2016, and in recent years the situation has worsened due to COVID-19. How can we support those in need in our regional communities and how can we end homelessness across regional WA?

This Roundtable was sponsored by Shelter WA and Regional Alliance West with the below guest speakers.



Lara Dalton, the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Geraldton - Lara has lived in Geraldton for most of her life and is passionate about supporting small business, creating jobs and quality healthcare. Lara was elected in 2021 and is the first woman to be elected in Geraldton's 131 year history. Lara will share the State Government's latest pilot program in Geraldton to assist those sleeping rough.



John Berger - Director of Engagement & Strategy for WA Alliance - John is a senior, professional CEO with over 30 year's experience in the Not for Profit and Government Sectors. Passionate about supporting the community particularly those who are vulnerable. Advocate and believer of ensuring the voice of lived experience is central to the design and reform of social services. A demonstrable and acknowledged leadership style and ecosystem thinking that has led to innovative approaches and significant change in the field of social services including homelessness and child protection in the West Australian context.



Rhiannon Bristow-Stagg - Regional Engagement Manager for Shelter WA - Rhiannon is an engagement and strategic planning professional with over 15 years experience in state and local government, not-for-profit and microbusiness sectors. Rhiannon brings a regional lens to engagement, considering the unique challenges and opportunities in each region. She has an interest in climate change, social inequality and housing



Elise Haddleton - Manager of Hear of my experience (HOME) - Elise is passionate about ending homelessness through collective impact, participatory community engagement, and creating healthy, inclusive, and just environments where people of all ages, abilities, and cultures can thrive. Elise brings over 15 years of experience in systems change and creative, collaborative solutions to her role as the manager for the Hear of My Experience (HOME) project. A long-time advocate for social and environmental justice with a Master's in Urban and Regional Planning.

Since the onset of the pandemic and subsequent border closures, Western Australia has been in an escalating housing crisis.

One in 15 Australian households were experiencing homelessness, overcrowded homes, or rental stress on census night in 2021 (Shelter WA). The national snapshot shows that 5.4 per cent of Perth households and 5.2 per cent of households in regional WA currently have unmet housing needs and 98% of rentals are not affordable on a single wage (Anglicare snapshot 2022).

'Mission Australia's Without a home: First-time youth homelessness in the COVID-19 period' report reveals almost one in 20 young people aged 15 to 19 who responded to Mission Australia's Youth Survey 2021 were homeless for the first time during the pandemic. Worryingly, this is a significant increase since 2017, when almost one in 25 young people had recently been pushed into first-time homelessness.

Paul Flatau from the Centre for Social Impact - University of WA said about their 'Ending Homelessness in WA 2022' report that "The data reflects an overrepresentation of people experiencing homelessness in regional WA relative to Perth. While only 6.3 per cent of Western Australians live in remote or very remote WA, 36 per cent of the clients who accessed Specialist Homelessness Services, resided in remote or very remote areas, with the outback north having the highest rate in Australia."

The RRR Network sought to understand the issue at a grassroots regional level primarily through the lens of women via its Roundtable program. It was also an intention of this Roundtable to impart local solutions to women who may be witness to people sleeping rough in their community. With the support of Shelter WA and Regional Alliance West, the RRR Network selected Geraldton to host a conversation on affordable social housing and how to end homelessness across regional WA.

The RRR Roundtable program does not expect to develop solutions to big problems, rather it creates rare opportunity for members of the community to gather, discuss big problems and hear directly from experts. In addition, the RRR Network has identified that RRR women are change-makers and if by supporting their knowledge development on environmental, social and governance issues - regional communities should ultimately benefit. Based on this, typically RRR Roundtable conversations have been attended mostly by interested women members of the public.

However, at this Roundtable, nearly all participants worked in the homelessness sector and only a few were members of the public. This meant that the room was already informed, take-home toolkits were not as important, and conversations were sector focussed and targeted from start to end. This unexpectedly changed the pace of the Roundtable, and it was observed that whilst the speaker information was comprehensive and challenging ideas were presented, it appeared that the participants discovered more value on their regional sector coming together to share, reflect and for some - meet each other for the first time.

The non-sector participants were an interesting addition to the conversation. We had people from small business, the public service, and a property developer. Their contributions were innovative and bold. For example, the property developer, believed a community group in Geraldton to end homelessness should be established, including stakeholders

that are involved in planning and delivering housing, such as local government, property developers, small business, and people within the homelessness sector to improve knowledge sharing, identify opportunities and explore challenges. The Roundtable was a great example of diversity in action.

The participants had learnt about other regional local governments who had an ending homelessness policy and how important this was to have a reference point from which the community and the local regional sector could work from. One local government had identified property opportunity, researched, developed, held a housing roundtable, endorsed business case proposal to help alleviate housing shortage for over 55's and key workers (Shire of Broome). This example of leadership not only helps to reduce homelessness in a community, but it also goes a long way in breaking down community stigma, builds compassion and improve understanding of lived experience of those sleeping rough and without homes. It was raised that we really must shift our thinking that homelessness is a systems issue (cause) not an individual issue (blame). The media and community leaders are just some of the local stakeholders that can help with this shift.

John Berger who is the Director of Engagement and Strategic Projects for WA Alliance spoke about collaboration and community leadership. Collaboration within the sector was discussed at length and in general this was thought to be happening. Although John shared how collaboration can be optimised through effective community leadership. It was discussed that local government, business, community, and the care sector all needed to work together. The combined diversity would drive place based solutions and could accelerate ending homelessness in a region. Place-based approaches target the specific circumstances of a place and engage the community and a broad range of local organisations from different sectors as active participants in their development and implementation.

John shared how the work conducted by the WA Alliance is guided by evidence and statistics. John explained how the evidence suggests that a single agency needs to track homelessness in real time as anonymous annual surveys and Census data are simply not enough and often are out of date by the time this data is provided to the agencies to assist. John focuses his work on the people who are impacted and their personal and authentic stories. He believes that housing and homelessness are both a local community issue as well as a wider societal issue and that everyone has a role to play in ending homelessness. Also, homelessness should be a one off, brief, and resolved quickly. If not, people may find themselves in housing stress for years.

Rhiannon Bristow-Stagg from Shelter WA believed that the regions required place-based approaches. This approach becomes more apparent when reviewing the "Dropping of the Edge 2021 Report" taking into consideration the size of Western Australia and its varied socio and economic disadvantages. Rhiannon's work focused on the WA 's regions and exploring ways to combat homelessness. Such as, identifying lazy land, modular housing (faster, more effective, can be moved if needed), community housing, housing diversity pipeline, Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations (ACHO), National Housing Infrastructure Facility (NHIF), Key Start and more.

Lara Dalton the Member for Geraldton conveyed how complex the housing and building situation was in Geraldton and seeing this first-hand in her work left her feeling deeply concerned. However, Lara did go on to say that "we must remember to have faith in the strategy as the State Government is committing to housing; there is a 'Homelessness Portfolio" and a Minister for Homelessness – a first for WA – the Hon John Carey BA MLA". Lara also spoke of speaking

with the Minister for Women's Interests, the Hon Simone McGurk MLA and the recently launched "All Paths Lead to Home" strategy. She shared that the Minister also spoke of confidence in the strategy and if we continue to take the State Government's lead, we will reduce homelessness in Western Australia and hopefully end it altogether. Finally, Lara believed collaboration and communication amongst agencies should be a priority.

Since the Roundtable event, it was announced that the State Government is assisting rough sleepers in to 100 social homes. This includes, \$24.2 million reform package, partnering with Housing Choice to deliver 100 homes for rough sleepers, \$2.3 million boost to homelessness accommodation operated by St Barts and funding to support better data collection across the Homelessness sector through the By Name List.

Elise Haddleton from Shelter WA discussed how vulnerability and homelessness is socially constructed. Furthermore, it can be understood as a 'spectrum' that is made up of socially constructed prejudices, such as racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and ableism. In addition to this, when we consider these prejudices and overlay them with individual risk, resilience, geography, climate change, marginalisation, and access to resources we can make better sense of socio-economic developmental pathways that lead to homelessness. Elise believed that with deep listening and engaging those with lived experience to be part of the solution was an effective way, such as the 'Hear of my Experience' (HOME) program.

In conclusion, it was clear that the Mid West Roundtable participants were passionate, positive, and resilient individuals who were committed to helping those in need. However, there was an underlying theme that ending homelessness was everyone's responsibility and local government must take the lead. The regional environment is quite different to metro and therefore the approach to homelessness must be grassroots - where community, small business and local government come together to help others in their own community. Finally, if we invest time, compassion, resources, and leadership - we could end homelessness in the not-too-distant future.

Read article by Shelter WA on the Geraldton RRR Roundtable - [here](#).

Comments, Ideas and Problems raised by our participants:

- Collaboration between agencies.
- is an issue due to confidentiality.
- Need community, NGO, Government involvement.
- NGOs often compete for funding, which creates roadblocks; disconnects and fractures agencies.
- Often, the end goal of helping others is the same.
- How can we ease this barrier?
- Consultants to open doors to in-depth assessments - deep listening - authentic, individual, and appropriate assistance.
- Some grants don't run long enough for a project to make a real impact.
- Rent to buy options are now limited or non-existent.
- AirBnB
- What can they answer for?
- Will there ever be any government regulations?

- Can the government approach private shop owners regarding their unused second storey spaces?
- Refurbish and allow people to rent.
- Stigma is still an issue.
- The media is partially responsible for this stigma as well.
- Data : We want to know our local data for our own communities
- Who is collecting and reporting this data? Who is responsible for it?
- Agencies can only help when they know that people need their help.
- Anecdotal evidence of people who travel to small regional communities
- Programs have conditions and requirements that may not apply to everyone.
- People need to feel like they belong to the community they are housed in; it's not all about finances and health, but also belonging.

Recommendations:

- 1) Regional people working in the homelessness sector need to get together annually for the purpose of information sharing and strengthening local sector networks. Regions will need to take the lead and facilitate.
- 2) Local Government is ideally suited to lead a regional town in ending homelessness. Responsibility does not fall on one agency alone, but it is a collaboration that includes the State Government, Local Government, local sector, small business and community.

Resources:

Elise Haddleton's Presentation <https://www.rrrnetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/RRR-Presentation-EH.pdf>

Rhiannon Bristow-Stagg's Presentation <https://www.rrrnetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2022-RRR-Roundtable-Geraldton-Rhiannon.pdf>

John Berger's Presentation <https://www.rrrnetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Alliance-Presentation-Geraldton-Oct-2022.pdf>

Dropping off the Edge Report (DOTE) https://www.rrrnetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/DOTE_Report_Final.pdf

All Paths Lead to Home Strategy <https://www.rrrnetwork.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/homelessness-strategy-final.pdf>

Unmet Housing Need <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/quantifying-australias-unmet-housing-need/>

Hear of my experience - HOME <https://www.shelterwa.org.au/our-work/campaigns-projects/home-hear-of-my-experience/>